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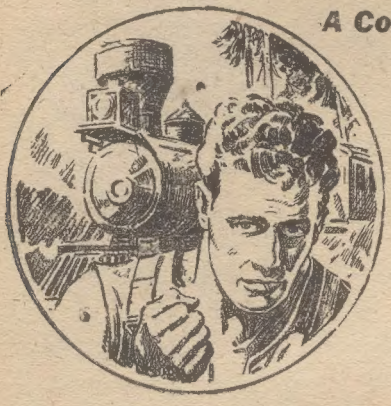
# The Rio Kid Western

Vol. VIII, No. 3 *EVERY STORY BRAND NEW* Winter Issue



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*Also See Portrait and Biography of Jim Bridger, Page 25; Brigham Young, Page 33, and General Grenville M. Dodge, Page 41*

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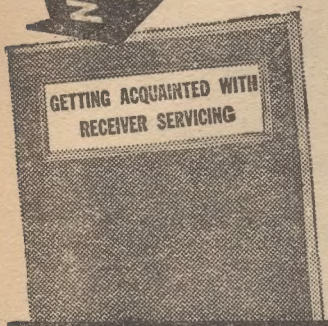


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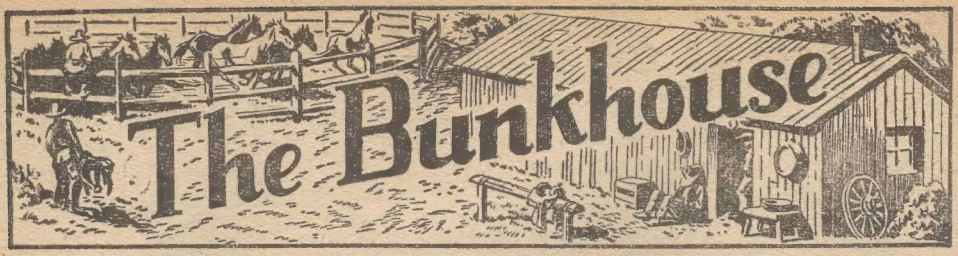


## A Department for Readers Conducted by FOGHORN CLANCY

*America's Most Famous Rodeo Expert and Handicapper*

HI, WADDIES, here we are again at the Bunkhouse. It's really a swell meeting place and we are always glad to have you drop around. There are always a lot of yarns being told around any regular bunkhouse, and usually there's lots of action. Cowboys are great hands to play jokes on one another, and if there is anything that a cowboy really dislikes it is a braggart and this recalls an incident that took place in our own ranch bunkhouse in Texas back in '96.

I was just a kid, just 14 to be exact, but big enough to believe that I was one of the important hands of the ranch, and like most youngsters I had picked out my ideal of the bunch of cowboys and tried to be as much like him as possible.

His name was Jim Woods, and he was a great bronc rider, a good all-around hand, ready for hard work or hard play, full of life and energy. This incident occurred just a few weeks after Woods had conquered the great bucking horse of Texas at that time, "Burgett," and of course Woods was the envy of all the people of that section, and especially of the folks on the ranch.

### *Three New Hands*

We were short of hands for the spring round-up, and one morning early just as we were saddling to ride after the herd, up rode three hombres and said they were looking for a job. They didn't have to look any further, the boss hired them on the spot, yelled to the cook to wrestle them some breakfast, and had some of the boys rope horses for them to ride.

As we were in a hurry, these new hands got more attention than they would under ordinary circumstances. I could see Jim Woods eyeing these new hands and I was sure that he had not taken any great fancy to them, and even before they had finished their breakfast and we had started out on the range I had already made up my mind that I did not like them.

I guess I have had to listen to my share of braggarts, but never to any that could beat those three, they were the champions. Of course they did not brag about being better cowhands than anyone else, because we were on the proving grounds then and they would have had to prove it then and there, but their bragging was mostly about fighting.

To listen to them, they were three of the toughest guys in the world and something would have happened by the middle of the afternoon to have tested their toughness if the boss had not been along, but his presence cramped the style of the cowboys and they could not do anything to prove the mettle of the new hands. As cowboys they were only fair, hardly that and before nightfall everybody including the boss was thoroughly disgusted with the bragging done by the trio.

### *A Plot is Hatched*

We were working near the ranch headquarters, and so carried our lunch in our saddlebags and returned to the ranchhouse for supper and for the night. The fastest work when we arrived back at the corral was done by the new hands unsaddling and getting ready for chuck.

All the regular hands seemed to know that there was something on the mind of Jim Woods and as he was a kind of leader of the bunch, the boys lingered, and sure enough he did have something on his mind and so a plot was hatched to test the courage of the new hands.

The bunkhouse was a double affair, I believe the modern word would be duplex. It was a long shacklike building with a partition across near the center making it a bunkhouse with two long rooms.

Woods very adroitly chaperoned the new hands into the unoccupied room where they were segregated from the regular hands, all of whom occupied the other room.

### *Nary a Peek!*

Soon after that a poker game started among the regular hands, and at a given signal a big argument started which was followed by a really healthy sham free-for-all fight, then three shots rang out, there was the thud of a falling body, and someone said "My God, you've killed him!" There, upon the floor, apparently cold in death, lay Henry Reynolds,

*(Continued on page 10)*

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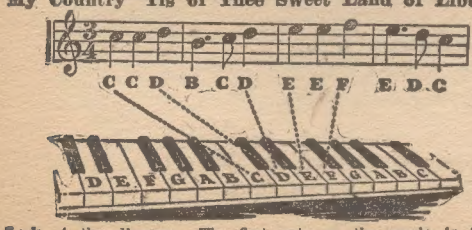


Look at the diagram. The first note on the music is "C". Follow the dotted line to the keyboard and locate "C" on the piano. Find the other notes the same way. Now strike the notes as indicated and you'll be playing the melody of the famous patriotic hymn, "America." Easy as A-B-C, isn't it?

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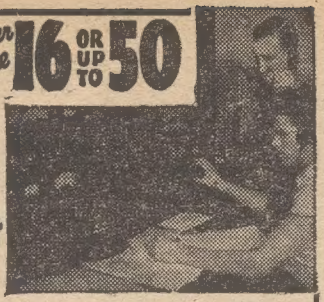

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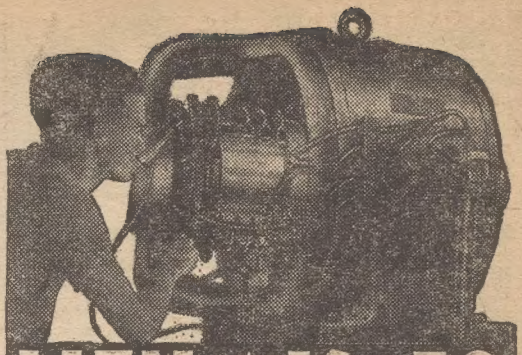

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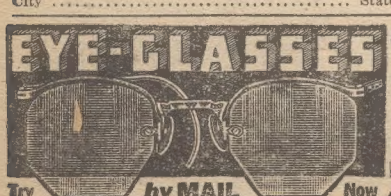

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620 North Michigan Avenue, Dept. 201, Chicago, Illinois


## THE BUNKHOUSE

*(Continued from page 6)*

the front of his shirt oozing something that looked like blood, but a close inspection would have told that it was half a bottle of catsup purloined from the cook. This part of the act was for the benefit of the new hands in case they peeked, but nary a peek.

The supposed killer, Joe Kelly, had been disarmed and there was a discussion going on in our side of the bunkhouse as to whether the body should be hidden and Joe assisted in making a getaway, or whether he should be turned over to the law.

In a few minutes we realized that the other side of the bunkhouse was empty, and then we filed out in the shadow of the bunkhouse and watched the trio of braggarts, the three whose talk would, if believed, have a fellow thinking they were the bravest men who ever rode through that section of the country, quietly and stealthily saddle their horses and lead them a distance away before mounting.

But once in the saddle, they really rode faster than they had ridden at any time that day in the work with the herd, they forgot, or were in too big a hurry to stop and collect for the day's work, and we never saw anything of them afterward. The boss didn't seem to mind them being gone, because I doubt if he could have stood another day of their bragging.

### *"Curley Bill"*

The brave men of the early West, the men who helped to win that vast expanse of which we are now very proud, were not braggarts. Once in a while there would be an outlaw or even a lawman who was more or less vain, who was proud of his reputation, so proud in fact that he would probably take unnecessary chances in order to uphold that reputation.

William Graham, better known as "Curley Bill," an outlaw who was one of the most feared killers of the early days of Arizona, was one of that class of vain individuals that would go to almost any length to uphold his reputation, and while he did not really brag about it he was proud of his record of having killed thirty-two men.

"Curley Bill" would not have helped a lawman do anything under ordinary circumstances, because he was against the law and lawmen, but there was a deputy sheriff, Billy Breakenridge, who needed the aid of such a man as Curley Bill to help him collect taxes from the ranchers of Cochise County, who were known cattle rustlers. Breakenridge was smart enough to know how to obtain that help, which was by playing upon the vanity of the outlaw.

Billy Breakenridge rode over to Galeyville, which was Bill's headquarters at the time. He entered a saloon where he had been informed that the outlaw sometimes hung out and boldly asked the bartender where he could find Curley Bill.

The bartender pointed to a man who was curled up on a pool table, asleep, and informed Breakenridge that there was the man whom he had asked for. Suspicioning that the inquirer might be a lawman looking for Bill for some crime or other, the bartender, not

wishing for any one to get the drop on Bill, called to him that there was a man present who wished to see him.

*Handy with a Six-Gun*

Bill raised himself up on one elbow and looked the situation over. The bartender turned to take a drink of water and just as he raised the tin cup to his lips, Bill flipped his six-shooter into position and shot the tin cup out of the bartender's hand, with the remark, "That stuff ain't fit to drink."

This act of course was to let the party who might be looking for him know that he was handy with a six-gun and also for the purpose of having his gun ready in case it was needed, because the distance from gun-scabbard to the hand in cases where a lawman had come upon a wanted outlaw was often the difference between life and death.

Deputy Sheriff Breakenridge apparently paid no attention to the shooting but walked over to where Bill was, introduced himself and unfolded his plan of having Bill go with him to collect the taxes. At the same time he was careful to let Bill know how much he was impressed with the greatness of the outlaw among the others of that section.

He told the outlaw that he knew his life would not be worth a pewter nickel if he went to collect those taxes alone but with a man like Curley Bill whom he new the outlaws feared, he felt perfectly safe. The plan was so original that it appealed not only to Bill's vanity, but also to his sense of humor and he readily agreed to accompany Breakenridge over the country to the different ranches as a bodyguard on his tour of collection.

*True to His Trust*

Whatever else may be said of the outlaw, Curley Bill, he was true to his trust with the deputy sheriff and made an excellent bodyguard. They rode together for weeks, sleeping under the same blankets, fasting and feasting together, as the case might have been, but no doubt all the time Breakenridge was playing upon the vanity of the outlaw.

The collection trip was a financial success and Bill accompanied Deputy Billy Breakenridge to within sight of Tombstone, the lawman's headquarters, bade him a cordial goodbye and turned his horse's head back toward Gayleyville.

Although an outlaw in every sense of the word, Curley Bill was a square-shooter with his friends or anyone who had done him a favor, and Billy Breakenridge was good enough at character analysis so that he knew

*(Continued on Page 91)*

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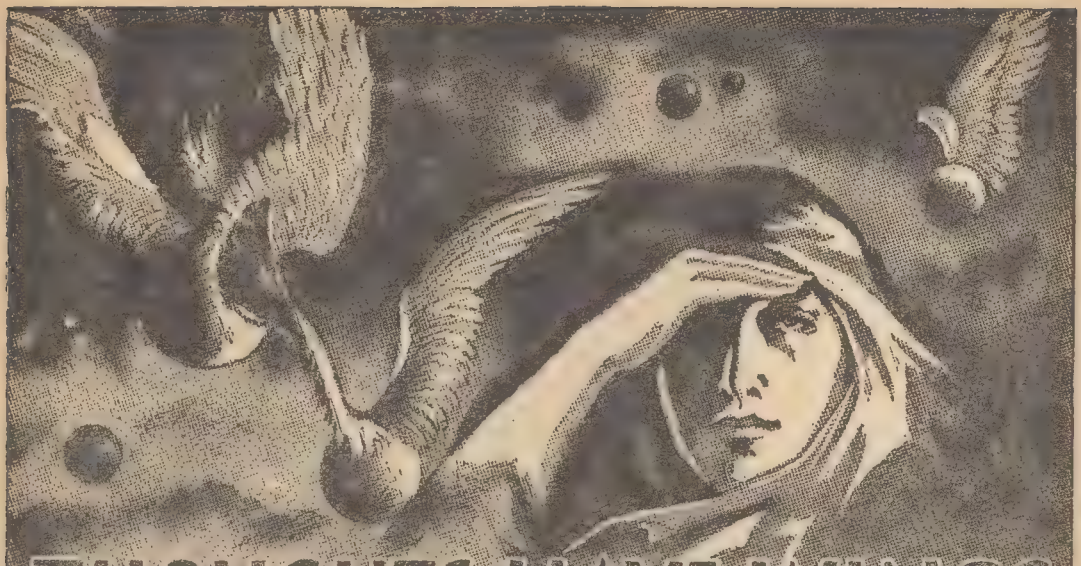

# THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

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TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

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The weapon of a gunman in the doorway shifted toward Mary (CHAPTER VIII)

# KING OF UTAH

## By LEE E. WELLS

*Bushwhack lead greets straight-shooting Bob Pryor when he rides into the country of the Great Salt Desert to rid the Union Pacific of lawless lobos who stand in the way of progress!*

### CHAPTER I

*Attack in the Desert*

IT WAS a universe of desolation, a world of chaos. Long ranges of granite peaks threw harsh and broken fingers into the blazing blue sky from horizon to horizon. The valleys were floored with sand that greedily absorbed the sun's heat and threw it back, intensified, into the faces of the two riders who came from the South, from Arizona.

They seemed the only living things in this desert land of southern Utah. To the north, beyond the next mountain range lay St. George, the farthest outpost of the Mormons who planned to change this inferno of sand and rock into a "flowering garden, Utah's Dixie."

One of the riders, Captain Bob Pryor, late of the Army of the United States, was a tall man, wearing a blue tunic and blue close-fitting trousers that were pushed down into highly polished, black cavalry boots, with silver Army spurs. Crossed gun-belts were at his waist, the butts of the two heavy cavalry pistols close to his hand. Cartridge belts crossed his broad chest and a powerful

rifle rode in a scabbard beneath his leg.

His blue eyes were shaded by the big Stetson that covered his close-cropped chestnut hair. His face was clean-cut, tanned, and there was the touch of the grim fighting man in the set of the strong chin. The lips were full, with a suggestion of humor at the corners that was one of his main characteristics. And in his blue eyes was a devil-may-care glint that showed his reckless courage.

The angle at which he wore his hat—a campaign felt—the wide shoulders, the way his trim body swayed to the movement of his horse, marked him as the ideal cavalry officer. So also did that lithe figure, strong but in no sense burly, for the broad shoulders tapered to narrow waist and hips. Captain Bob Pryor, however, was not only a notable figure in the West because of his enviable Army record, but for another reason. For now he was even better known as the Rio Kid, a man whose lightning-fast guns were freely offered to those who fought to establish law and order, who sought to break the outlaw rule that held much of the territory in its evil grasp.

As such a man, the Rio Kid was known from Montana to Mexico.

He had been born in Texas, along the Rio Grande. When the War between the States broke out, he had offered his services immediately to the Union. He had fought with bravery and distinction under Generals Sherman and Custer, and they had been quick to use his ability as a scout. Four years of bitter war had left its mark on him, but they had also brought fame. After Appomattox, he had left the service and started for home.

BUT Bob Pryor, now the Rio Kid, was never again to return to peace and obscurity. He found his home burned and his parents killed by the merciless guns of Border outlaws. From that moment his home had been wherever he chanced to be, for wanderlust had claimed him, and he had dedicated his life to the righting of wrongs wherever he found men oppressed or robbed. His reputation had grown all over the West, until now he was a man respected by most, but hated and feared by outlaws, schemers and renegades.

He twisted around in the saddle and his keen eyes swept the horizon. As he wiped the sweat from his forehead, his wide lips broke in a smile.

"Celestino," he said, in his clear, deep voice, "I reckon mebbe yuh could call this country the doorstep to Hades."

His companion flashed a gleaming smile.

"*Si, si,* my General. She is hot, no?"

The Rio Kid's smile faded, and his eyes grew somber. He nodded.

"Yeah, hot. But from what General Dodge writes, we're shore goin' to find it hotter up around Corinne."

Celestino Mireles shrugged. He pulled the brim of his peaked sombrero lower over his sharp and piercing black eyes.

His dark skin was the tint of the high-born Mexican, his cheekbones high, his features patrician, and his lips were thin, though ever ready to smile or to flatten into a fighting line. He wore Mexican dress, although the velvet suit with short jacket and trousers that flared at the bottom was somewhat worn. Around his waist was a red sash into which was stuck his pistols, and a long knife, his favorite weapon. On this present long trip now, there was also a rifle scabbard on his saddle.

When Celestino Mireles had been in his teens, the Rio Kid had saved the young Mexican's life, rescuing him from an outlaw band on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, a band which had killed his parents and looted their *hacienda.* From that moment on, Celestino had devoted his life to his "General," as he called Captain Bob Pryor. He was the Rio Kid's shadow, his guard—not his servant, but his devoted friend.

The Rio Kid's keen blue eyes searched the rock scarps that hemmed them in. Suddenly he drew rein. He had caught a flash of light as of sun on glass. Celestino reined in and his hand dropped toward the low-tied holster.

"What is it, General?"

The Rio Kid studied the broken cliff face across the valley.

"I'd say it was a gleam of sun on a pair of field-glasses. Now who'd want to be watchin' us?"

Celestino shrugged again. "In thees country there are those who flee the law, no? You have made enemies, General."

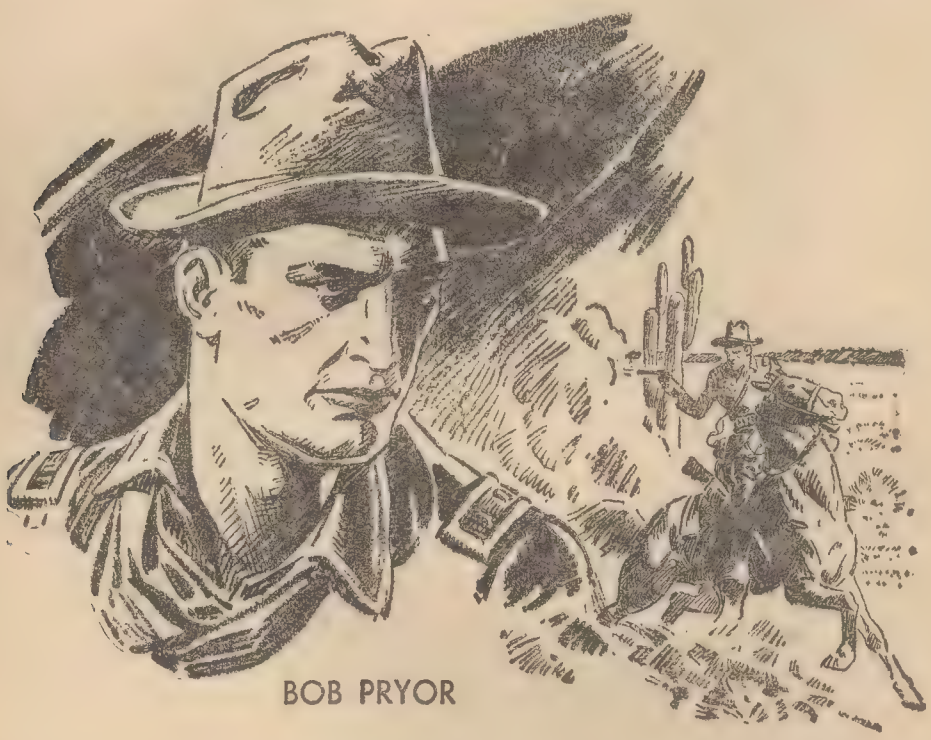
The Rio Kid smiled briefly, without humor. He touched spurs lightly to his familiar war-horse, Saber, a mouse-colored dun with a black stripe down his back. Saber was of the "breed that never dies," as it was called in the Southwest.

That mount of the Rio Kid's was as much of a fetish with him as was his passion for neatness that he had developed in the Army. For, although Saber was far from prepossessing, Pryor was proud of him, declaring that the animal could outrun anything on four legs.

Moreover, the horse enjoyed a scrap as much as did his rider, and would run into battle joyfully. Gunfire attracted him, and battle appeared to give him an outlet for his bad temper which Pryor subdued at other times. The bad temper had its advantages—and disadvantages. For he could be depended on to take his part in any fight, since he would lash out and bite at any other horses, or at strangers, unless ordered by Bob Pryor to behave. One eye was mirled, with blue and white streaks, and rolled wildly when Saber was excited.

WITH the Rio Kid, however, Saber was always docile and obedient. Wherever he might be he would always come like a streak when he heard his rider whistle a bar of the old Army ditty:

Said the Big Black Charger to the Little White Mare.



BOB PRYOR

At the Rio Kid's word of command now, Saber tossed his mane and stepped eagerly forward. His ears pricked up and he restlessly shook his head, snorting.

The Rio Kid patted the arched neck. "Yuh smell danger, Saber? We'll keep our eyes sharp and our sixes loose."

The horse rolled its mirled eye as though it thoroughly understood.

The two men pushed steadily across the valley and slowly the trail mounted toward a low pass through the range. The Rio Kid kept watching the rimrock, searching for the telltale flash

that would mark the hidden spy who watched them from a distance.

This spying puzzled Pryor. He was sure that no one but General Dodge knew that he would be riding this way. He reached into his tunic pocket and pulled out the letter that had brought him and Celestino post-haste from Tucson, heading north toward the distant Great Salt Lake.

He unfolded the letter and read it again. It was brief and to the point, typical of the man who wrote it. The general had written:

I am having a great deal of trouble from the riffraff in and around Corinne. This is delaying the building of the Union Pacific and every mile lost means the loss of land subsidies to the railroad whose value will be immense. I need you, Captain Pryor, to put the fear and respect of the law into these gunmen, outlaws and badmen who make Corinne their base. I intend to push the railroad forward and I do not expect to be hamstrung by lawlessness and destruction of property. I shall expect to see you in Corinne by the fifth of next month unless you write me otherwise.

It was signed in Dodge's careful scrawl.

The Rio Kid and Celestino had started north the day after the letter had reached Pryor. They had told no one of their destination. Bob Pryor thoughtfully rubbed his hand along his jaw. Dodge might have said something at the other end of the trail, but it wasn't like him.

They had come into the pass now and it was like entering an oven. The sun was reflected in a million blasting angles from the bare rock, and it was hard to breathe. The two men pulled their hats lower and squinted their eyes against the blinding glare of the rocks.

Suddenly Saber shivered down the length of the black stripe and the Rio Kid jerked up his head in alarm. He was accustomed to that shiver. It was a certain signal of danger, nearby and deadly.

In that instant a rifle shot cracked from above. The Rio Kid's hat sailed from his head. With a quick twist he sent Saber to one side of the trail. Celestino shouted and slid his rifle from the scabbard. It jumped to his shoulder and he fired upward toward the broken rocks that lined the pass.

Bob Pryor touched spurs and Saber cut fast along the wall, streaking for the mouth of the pass. There were no further shots and, when the rock walls fell away to either side, there was no sign of the ambusher. The Rio Kid pulled up his horse and his keen eyes searched the rocks. His hand remained close to the holstered Colt.

At last Celestino came riding out of the pass, his face grim. He jerked his thumb back up toward the rocks.

"I miss heem, my General. It is *muy malo.*"

The Rio Kid nodded. "For whoever that hombre was. There's somebody that don't want us in Corinne, and he's shore startin' soon enough to make certain he gets our scalps."

HE NECK-REINED Saber around and returned to the pass. He came on his hat lying where it had fallen among the rocks, picked it up, and looked at the bullet-hole that had torn through the felt a scant fraction of an inch above his skull. He ran his finger into the hole, then raised a lean, hard face up toward the rim.

Jamming on his hat then, he returned to Celestino.

The trail led downward here, angling down the slope to the valley floor that was just as heat-blasted as the one before it had been.

But St. George was not far away and there would be relief from the long days of desert travel.

The two men rode slowly, pushing on through the long, hot afternoon. Celestino slumped in the saddle, sleeping as his mount plodded along. The Rio Kid kept his eyes busy, probing ahead and behind, half-hoping that he would meet the man who had tried to pull a dry-gulch play back in the pass.

At last the sun went down beyond the peaks and in its last golden glow, the Rio Kid saw the houses of St. George. He called to Celestino and pointed ahead.

"There's our campin' spot, *amigo.*" His face tightened and darkened. "I got a hunch we're goin' to run into a heap of trouble sign."

Celestino blinked open his eyes and stared ahead. He turned, his white teeth flashing in a grin.

"Trouble! That ees good, no?"

The Rio Kid laughed. "Depends how yuh look at it. Me, I figger trouble's where yuh find it."

As a bullet whispered close to the Rio Kid's cheek, Mary's horse screamed as a bullet slapped into its chest
(CHAPTER IV)

## CHAPTER II

### *The Girl at St. George*

ST. GEORGE was Mormon, ruled by the Church and the Council of Elders. It was a small village, just being built, but already the wide streets were staked out and there was a bare spot in the center of the town where the tabernacle would some day stand.

There were no saloons or dance halls, no gambling dives. One sprawling building served as a hotel for the few travelers who braved the deserts that lay on all sides, north toward Salt Lake and south toward the Arizona border.

In one of the rooms of this hotel a big man stood at a window looking out on the heat-blasted town. His face was square and harsh, the brutal jaw fringed with a heavy black beard that swept his barrel chest. His nose was hooked, and two bleak green eyes blazed out at the street below him. His big waist was circled by a heavy gun-belt and three notches were carefully cut in the hard wooden handle of the Colt in the scarred holster.

His knuckles rapped impatiently on the window frame and his voice angrily rumbled.

"So yuh had to be smart!" he growled at his companion. "I told yuh to spot him and report back to me."

The man to whom he spoke was thin as a piggin' string and short. He sat hump-shouldered on the bed and his pinched face worked jerkily. His long nose twitched and his watery blue eyes were red-rimmed. His spindly legs were stuck into dusty boots and he studied the cracked toe of one.

"Black," he said waveringly, his voice high-pitched and whiny, "that blasted Rio Kid was right below me and I had him steady in my rifle sights."

"Black" Judkins whirled, his face livid with anger.

"Yuh had him notched—and yuh missed!"

The little man shrank back and his thin hands pushed out from his body.

"I reckon it was the sweat drippin' off my face. I don't see how—but I shore missed." He added hastily, "Not more'n an inch, though!"

Judkins growled an oath and tugged at his whiskers. He paced back and forth, his heavy boots rapping sharply against the bare, wide planks of the floor. Sweat stains were on his dirty checked shirt, and the perspiration stood in beads on his low, red forehead.

"Todd and me planned to get him with some of the boys north of here," he growled. "Now yuh've spoiled that. The Rio Kid and that Mex pard of his will be spooked all the way to Salt Lake now. Peewee, I shore ought to break yuh right in two."

"Peewee" Barton nervously licked his thin lips.

"Shucks," he protested, "there'll be more chances, Black. Ain't they a thousand places the boys could wait for him?"

Black swung around, his beard bristling. "Yuh ain't heard of the Rio Kid? That hombre is poison-fast with his sixes and sleeps like a cat. It'll be three times as hard to set a trap now that yuh've warned him. If they was only some way we could—"

Black Judkins broke off sharply and stared at Peewee. Slowly his thick lips broke into a grin beneath the beard and he slapped his big hands together.

"Blazin' topknot, I got it! Peewee, you look mighty scrawny, and I reckon the Rio Kid'd feel plumb sorry for yuh was yuh to be afraid to go north by yoreself."

Peewee looked up, his watery eyes widening. "Black, are yuh gettin' touched by the heat?"

The big man made an impatient gesture. "Shut up and listen. Now here's what yuh do."

HE SAT down on the bed beside Peewee Barton and his loud voice lowered to a mumbling whisper. He talked fast, emphasizing his points by striking his big knee with his fist. The little man listened, nodding now and then. At last Black Judkins finished and arose.

Peewee Barton shook his head in amazement.

"Black, yuh shore are a smart hombre. It's a slick plan and I reckon I can take care of the Rio Kid's fangs so's the boys

won't get hurt. Make it two days north where the trail winds through the lava beds."

Judkins nodded and shifted the gunbelt to a more comfortable position around his waist.

"That's a good place. I can hide the boys and if yuh do yore part, the Rio Kid and that Mex won't have a chance. We'll shore take his scalp back to Todd."

Peewee Barton arose and walked to the door. He returned, smiling evilly. His hand caressed his holster.

"I reckon I'll make up for the bad

CELESTINO MIRELES

shootin'." He grinned and left the room. . . .

At that moment, the Rio Kid and Celestino rode into the outskirts of St. George. A few of the natives gave them the quick, suspicious looks of the Mormon of that day toward outsiders. The memory of persecution was too sharp in their minds to trust strangers who rode into the town. But the Rio Kid's open, clean-lined face killed suspicion, and no one stopped the two men to question them.

They rode easily in the saddle, down the street toward the center of town. The Rio Kid's eyes showed his interest in the way in which the Mormons were fighting the wilderness that surrounded them. He had noticed the fields beyond the town, the attempts to dam and tame the river that in flood time could throw tons of torrential water onto the little farms. His keen eyes did not miss the signs of hard labor in the stern mouths and eyes of the men he met on the street.

"Is eet not the hotel ahead, my General?" Celestino said softly.

The Rio Kid looked ahead and nodded. "That's it. Mebbe we'll run into our bushwhacking friend."

They dismounted before the building. From above, Black Judkins watched them, ready to jerk out of sight should either of them look up. The cold green eyes traveled over the Rio Kid, weighing and judging him. Black half lifted the Colt from the holster, then let it drop back. Not time for that yet.

The Rio Kid turned Saber over to Celestino, beat the dust from his clothing and entered the building. The room was long and wide, the ceiling low. To one side were a few tables where meals could be served. Straight ahead was a plain pine counter and a thick, heavy register. A bearded man stood behind the counter, his soft gray eyes counteracting the stern, forbidding line of jaw and mouth.

"Welcome to St. George, Brother," he murmured.

"Thanks," Bob Pryor answered. "I'll be ridin' on north in the mornin'."

He signed the register and the bearded clerk turned it around again to read the name. A girl came into the room as the clerk exclaimed in surprise:

"Captain Pryor! We've heard a lot about you down this way, sir."

The Rio Kid smiled. "Thanks. I hope it's been good."

The clerk handed him a key. "Room Twelve, Captain. It's at the end of the hall on the second floor. I'll send your friend up when he comes in."

THE Rio Kid accepted the key and turned from the desk. His glance caught the startled look on the girl's face. She was tall and graceful, dressed in ruffled black. It accentuated her fair skin and the corn-gold hair piled high on her head. Her eyes were a deep violet, and slanted in an almost Oriental effect. Her face was smooth and oval, the chin firm, the fair skin deepened by sun to a smooth cream color.

She flushed slightly under the Rio Kid's stare and hurried to the door. Bob

Pryor watched her go out to the street. He had a definite impression that she had been about to speak to him.

He turned to the clerk. "Who was that lady?"

"That was Miss Fitzhugh, sir. She is traveling to Corinne."

The Rio Kid's brows arched, but he said nothing. He climbed the stairs and found his room at the end of a long hall. It was pleasant enough once he had the windows open and the first cool breeze of the evening stirred into the room.

In a few minutes Celestino joined him. They washed the dust of the long journey from their faces in the flowered basin on a little stand in one corner.

Then they had supper in the small dining room downstairs, hot with lamplight. At once the Rio Kid caught sight of Miss Fitzhugh at a table across the room. In the lamplight her eyes were dark and deep, and twice when the Rio Kid looked up it was to surprise her steady, weighting gaze.

Celestino's foot touched his beneath the table and the young Mexican leaned forward, speaking low.

"General, there ees one who watches us."

The Rio Kid nodded. "Yeah, I been watchin' her."

Celestino's eyes widened. "But, my General, she is not a she. She is a he. Eet is the hombre in the corner."

Without moving his head, the Rio Kid shot a sidelong glance in the direction Celestino indicated. He saw a thin little man with a pinched face and watery blue eyes. His tapering fingers nervously formed bread crumbs into pellets that he rolled under his plate. As the Rio Kid looked, the man abruptly stood up and shoved his chair into place.

He crossed the room directly to the Rio Kid's table. His manner was hesitant and apologetic.

"Beggin' yore pardon, gents, but I'd shore like a word with yuh."

The Rio Kid's eyes swept over the man, noting the red rims of the eyes, the gun-belt that sagged from the man's waist. The fellow was no Mormon, the Rio Kid knew. He leaned back and motioned the stranger to take a chair.

The man smiled crookedly in thanks and sat down. His watery eyes shifted from Celestino to the Rio Kid and rested there.

"I reckon yuh're Captain Pryor. My handle's Barton."

The Rio Kid smiled. "Glad to know yuh, Barton. What's on yore mind?"

The little man hitched his chair closer and his voice lowered.

"I been runnin' a store down in Phoenix and I've heard of the good chances a man would have sellin' to the workers on the Union Pacific. I sold my place and I'm tryin' to get to Corinne or Ogden. I figger I could buy a place and do right well up there."

The Rio Kid nodded, puzzled. "I reckon yuh could, but what has that to do with us?"

Barton leaned even closer and the Rio Kid noticed the broken teeth. Barton jabbed at the table with his finger.

"It's like this, Captain. I got that *dinero* on me. I'm just a little runt and I've been travelin' alone, but I'm scared some gent might throw a six on me. That would shore put me in a bad spot, gents."

BOB PRYOR'S sharp glance probed at the man's face. He didn't like the fellow's appearance, but that could not always be trusted. He knew a dozen upright, honest men who looked like bearded cutthroats.

Barton shrugged his thin shoulders. "I reckon that's my problem, gents, and I'd shore appreciate if yuh'd let me mosey on north with yuh. Captain Pryor, there ain't no road agent goin' to trouble you."

The Rio Kid shot a quick glance at Celestino who pursed his lips thoughtfully, then made a slight gesture with his hand that meant he didn't care.

Barton eagerly pressed the point. "Captain Pryor, I shore won't be a bother. Shucks, I'm trail-wise. I'll make it worth yore while when we get to Corinne."

The Rio Kid smiled. "There'll be no charge, Barton, and yuh'll be welcome to ride along. Seems like yuh're puttin' a lot of trust in me and Celestino, though."

Barton laughed. "Who wouldn't? I reckon everybody knows about you."

They made arrangements when Barton was to meet them in the morning and the Rio Kid warned that he would be starting on time. It was all right with the little man. He thanked them again, profusely, then rose to leave. For a mo-

ment he hesitated. "Captain Pryor," he said tentatively, "I reckon yuh know yore business, but they's a couple of cut-offs along the trail that'll save us time. A friend of mine told me about 'em and I'd be right pleased to help yuh that much."

The Rio Kid smiled, his firm lips quirking in amusement.

"I'd appreciate it, Barton," he said. "I got to get to Corinne in a hurry."

## CHAPTER III

### *The Trail to Corinne*

HASTILY Peewee Barton left and the Rio Kid and Celestino finished their meal. As they arose, Bob Pryor's eyes turned toward the table where the girl had been sitting. She was not there.

The two men left the dining room and went outside. For a short while they walked slowly around St. George, the Rio Kid interested in the way in which this town was being built. Everywhere were the marks of Mormon enterprise and thrift, and of the courage and vision of this strange sect. Celestino walked silently, puffing on a dark Mexican cigarette.

They were returning to the hotel when Celestino spoke thoughtfully.

"General, eet is that thees Barton is good hombre?"

The Rio Kid chuckled. "He's too little to be anything else."

Celestino shrugged. "*Quien sabe?* The leetle snake, she has the poison like the big one, no?"

Bob Pryor looked around in amazement, then his hearty laugh broke out.

"Celestino, yuh named it. I don't think Barton wears a blotched brand, but we'll keep our eyes on him."

Celestino's smile flashed out. "General, that ees the wise thing, no?"

They turned in at the hotel. A dim light burned on the counter and the clerk was not in sight. The Rio Kid and Celestino noiselessly climbed the stairs and went down the hall to their room.

Bob Pryor had fished the key from his pocket and his hand had touched the knob when he froze, his muscles tensed with suspicion. His whisper was barely audible.

"Somebody's inside. The door's unlocked."

Celestino's slim hand snaked the heavy Colt from his holster. He touched the Rio Kid lightly on the shoulder.

"We find out, no?"

"Yes," the Rio Kid said, his voice grim.

He pushed open the door and flattened himself to one side, the big cavalry six jumping into his hand. There was a dim light from a low-trimmed lamp and instantly the Rio Kid's sharp eyes fastened on the slim figure that sat straight and stiff by the table.

His hand dropped from his gun and his eyes widened. Celestino said something soft under his breath and stared. It was the girl with the violet eyes who had watched them so closely in the dining room, her face composed, but her eyes shifting restlessly.

The Rio Kid swept off his Stetson and silently closed the door behind him. He came slowly toward the table, his face tight. The girl looked up and her red lips smiled uncertainly.

"I had to see you, Captain," she said, her voice low, "before you left in the morning."

Bob Pryor sank down in a chair, his lean face still puzzled.

"But I don't understand—"

The girl leaned forward. "There was a man at your table and I couldn't very well talk to you then. You've been gone most of the evening. Captain Pryor, my Father used to speak well of you—and I need help."

The Rio Kid shot a quick glance at Celestino and back to the girl.

"Yore father? Should I remember him?"

"Major Leroy Fitzhugh of Custer's Seventh Cavalry," she said quickly.

IMMEDIATELY Bob Pryor's face lighted with pleasure.

"Of course I remember him! A fine officer and a gentleman. We've gone through many a skirmish together. Where is he?"

Her dark eyes clouded and she sighed.

"I don't know, Captain Pryor. After the war he came West. He kept me in a school back East and wrote to me regu-

larly. The last I heard, he was in Ogden in business with my uncle, Mr. Todd Tolliver."

"Railroad supplies?" the Rio Kid asked.

She nodded. "That was it. About a year ago he stopped writing, but my allowance kept coming through. I wrote several times and at last Uncle Todd answered." She dropped her head and her fingers twisted a little square of a handkerchief. "Uncle Todd said Father had gone to California and he hadn't heard from him in some time."

The Rio Kid leaned back. "And there's been no word since?"

"No," she answered. "I've been frantic. I've written to Uncle Todd and at last he answered, quite brutally. He said there was still no word. Since I was getting the allowance regularly, I shouldn't worry. Uncle Todd promised to tell me as soon as he had definite news, but he asked that I not bother him with useless letters."

The Rio Kid's blue eyes gazed directly at her. He rubbed his fingers along his jaw.

"I think I know what's comin', Miss Fitzhugh. Yuh haven't written to yore Uncle Todd, but yuh decided to come out to see for yoreself."

She looked up, eagerly. "That's it. The wife of one of Father's old commanders invited me for a visit at Fort Wingate. That's where I've been. I decided suddenly that I had at least to talk to Uncle Todd. I came this far with some freighters, but there doesn't seem to be anyone but yourself going on to Corinne."

The Rio Kid nodded. "It's a hard, killin' trail. People don't take it unless it's necessary."

Her slender arm reached out and her tapering fingers touched the Rio Kid's hand.

"Could I go north with you, Captain Pryor? I won't be any trouble and—and I've *got* to find out about Father."

Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, drew back abruptly. He didn't like the idea of being responsible for the safety of this girl. From St. George north to the small Mormon settlements around Little Salt Lake was a desolate strip of country, heat-blasted, almost waterless. It would be hard on a girl.

Her eyes were pleading as he looked up. He regretfully shook his head.

"I couldn't, Miss Fitzhugh. There'll be a freight caravan makin' up some time—"

She flushed angrily and flounced to her feet. Her firm chin came up in a defiant gesture and the muscles in her soft cheeks bunched. She looked suddenly hard and competent. Her voice was cool and disdainful.

"I'm sorry to have bothered you, Captain Pryor. I'll buy a pack-horse and get along quite well by myself. Goodnight, Captain."

She walked purposefully toward the door. Bob Pryor watched her, amazed at the change that had come over her. She was at the door when he halted her.

"Miss Fitzhugh, I've changed my mind. I can see yuh're like yore father, and yuh'll hold up yore end on the trail. We leave at dawn. Yuh'll be ready?"

A glowing smile touched her face, and her eyes sparkled. Impulsively she stepped forward as though to kiss the Rio Kid, then halted. Her voice was breathless.

"Oh, yes, I'll be ready!"

"How many trunks?" the Rio Kid asked.

She laughed lightly. "For the trail to Corinne, just one satchel and a couple of saddle-bags. I'm trail-wise, Captain Pryor, and my name's Mary."

SHE turned and was gone. The Rio Kid looked at Celestino and flushed under the steady stare of the black eyes. The young Mexican crossed to the door and closed it.

"My General," he said, "eet is with the brass band and *saludas* that we go to Corinne, no? I think eet was to be very quiet that we come in to talk to thees General Dodge."

The Rio Kid grinned and stood up. He started to undress.

"Celestino, I reckon we've sort of picked up a crowd. But, shucks, I couldn't leave Major Fitzhugh's daughter stranded here."

Celestino shrugged. "And Senor Barton? He ees the cousin, maybe, of Major Fitzhugh?"

The Rio Kid sailed his boot at the Mexican and laughed. In a few moments the light was out and the two men stretched out in the muggy darkness. For a long time the Rio Kid looked up into the blackness toward the ceiling.

Finally he turned over and spoke, and his voice was thoughtful.

"Celestino, I knew Major Fitzhugh. He wouldn't treat his own daughter that way—just run off. I'll bet yuh all the *pesos* in Mexico that there's some sort of crooked trail up in Corinne. I aim to find out."

Celestino chuckled. "General, thees trouble you can't leave alone, no? General Dodge, he write for trouble—*bueno*. Now comes more. That is *muy bueno!*"

The Rio Kid laughed and went to sleep. . . .

It was still dark when they got up and went downstairs for breakfast. Mary Fitzhugh was waiting, eager to go. Peewee Barton yawned over a coffee cup and his pinched face looked grumpy and mean. He nodded surlily to the Rio Kid and came over to the table.

Mary Fitzhugh joined them and Bob Pryor introduced her to Barton. The little man looked at her, his watery eyes sweeping over her from head to toe. He turned, staring at the Rio Kid. His thin lips twisted angrily.

"I didn't know about her." He backed away from the table. "I—I forgot somethin'. I'll be right back."

He turned and scurried from the room, leaving the two men and the girl staring after him.

Peewee Barton hurried up the stairs and slipped into Black Judkins' room. The big man snored loudly on the bed.

He instantly snapped awake when Peewee shook him. He surged up from the bed, his big hands grabbing for the Colt under his pillow. Then his eyes focused and he relaxed. He yawned.

"I thought yuh'd be gone by now," he growled at Peewee angrily.

Barton paced back and forth from the bed to the door.

"That blasted Rio Kid's takin' a girl along with him," he finally burst out.

Judkins broke off a yawn and stared at Peewee.

"A girl! I hadn't figgered on that. She might get hurt. Who is she?"

Barton turned. "Mary Fitzhugh's her handle. She's goin' to Corinne."

Black Judkins blinked and his face sagged in startled lines.

"Fitzhugh! That was the name of Todd's pardner back before he—" Black broke off, and his feet hit the floor. "She's goin' to try to find her father! Todd ain't goin' to like that. Yuh shore that was the name, Peewee?"

The little man cursed harshly. "I ain't deaf, and I heard it plain. Mary Fitzhugh."

Black stared down at the floor. Then he looked up, his green eyes hard and cold. His big fist clenched.

"Peewee, she ain't to reach Corinne alive. Yuh got that? When the boys pull their trap, it's up to yuh to make shore she gets a slug where it'll shut her up for good."

BARTON froze, his thin lips slack. He slowly shook his head.

"Black, I can't do that. I reckon there's not much I'd balk at, but backshootin' women is one of them."

For all his bulk, Judkins moved fast. With a single, lithe twist, his long arm reached out and his powerful fingers gathered up Barton's shirt-front. He pulled the little man to him.

"Yuh do as I say!" he snarled in his face. "That woman ain't to reach Corinne alive! Now get on yore way and don't yuh fail. I'll put a slug through yuh myself, otherwise."

He pushed Peewee toward the door and the little man stumbled, catching himself as his shoulder hit the wall. He looked at Black, his watery blue eyes narrowed. His pinched face quivered with anger and his scrawny hand clawed out, then clenched. Black's stare beat him down. Peewee lowered his eyes, opened the door, and shuffled from the room.

Downstairs, the Rio Kid, Celestino and Mary Fitzhugh waited for him. They impatiently sat their horses in the street before the hotel. Peewee's ratty paint was already saddled, with Celestino holding the reins. Peewee mumbled an apology and climbed into the kak.

The party clattered down the street, headed north. Gradually the houses thinned and Sugarloaf Mountain slowly wheeled behind them. Ahead lay the long desolate trail north to the first of the old Mormon settlements along the rivers of central Utah.

At the end of the trail lay the trouble that General Dodge had mentioned, trouble that probably must be settled in gunsmoke. Up there also lay the answer to the mystery of the disappearance of Major Fitzhugh. The Rio Kid's broad

lips tightened as he thought of what lay ahead.

And off to their left, out of sight, Black Judkins led a band of gunhawks, pounding fast toward a trap of death in the lava beds far ahead.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Death in the Malpais*

DURING most of the first day Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, watched Mary Fitzhugh. He wanted to see how she would take the hardship of desert travel. If she showed signs of breaking under it, the Rio Kid could return her to St. George and only lose a day on the trail. The girl rode easily in the saddle and her spirits did not flag as the sun mounted higher and the heat blasted at them from above, and reflected in shimmering waves upward from the sand. Sweat stood in beads along her upper lip and her lips looked parched. She drank only sparingly out of the canteen on her saddle, and her slim shoulders were squared.

The Rio Kid felt pleased, and pulled Saber close to her.

"You'll do," he said briefly.

Mary flushed and smiled through the dust mask that covered her face.

"Thank you. Coming from Captain Pryor, that's a real compliment."

The Rio Kid grinned and rode ahead. Celestino joined him. Peewee Barton rode hump-shouldered, his hat pulled low over his face. He had said nothing for hours and his eyes seemed to grow more red-rimmed and watery. Several times, unnoticed by the others, he gazed malevolently at Mary's slim back and his hand caressed the butt of the Colt.

The day slowly passed and the party made progress. But there was not much energy left when, at last, along toward sundown, the Rio Kid called a halt. The country was more broken now and the Rio Kid picked the mouth of a canyon as a camping place. They picketed the horses.

Celestino built a fire while Bob Pryor rubbed Saber down and looked after the other mounts.

Peewee broke out the food supply and Mary efficiently prepared a simple meal. It was ready when the Rio Kid returned from the horses.

They ate in silence, bone-weary. Finished, the Rio Kid scoured his tin plate in sand and returned it to the saddlebag. He stretched his long arms.

"We'd better get some rest," he advised. "Tomorrow will be a hard day, but it'll be the last. After that, we'll hit the green country and travel will be easy to Ogden and Corinne."

In a few minutes they rolled into blankets, leaving Celestino to hug his knees by the fire and stand guard for the first few hours. Peewee Barton had growled and grumbled when the Rio Kid told him he would have to stand a trick of guard duty.

"There ain't no sense to it," Peewee had complained. "There ain't no hostile Injuns up thisaway and who's goin' to be prowlin' around in this section of tarnation?"

The Rio Kid had answered lightly but there had been a grim undertone to his voice.

"I don't know, Barton. But somebody spied on us with glasses the other side of St. George, and tried to put a rifle slug in our hides. We don't take chances. I'll call yuh when it's yore turn."

Peewee had turned away and rolled into his blanket. He silently cursed himself for that clumsy, foolish attempt at a drygulch. Black Judkins had been right. The Rio Kid was cautious and taking no chances.

Peewee rolled over and his thin lips pulled back in an evil smile that the darkness hid. Tomorrow at the lava beds would take care of the Rio Kid—and the girl. It was a pleasant thought, and he went to sleep with it still in his mind.

Morning dawned in a rainbow of sun-streaked red against a green and blue sky. Mary had breakfast ready by the time the men rolled out of the blankets, and it wasn't long before the horses were saddled and the party hit the trail once again.

Peewee maneuvered it so that he would bring up the rear. Not far ahead were the lava beds and the death-trap that waited to be sprung in the malpais.

## JIM BRIDGER

THE least known but probably greatest of all frontier scouts, Jim Bridger, was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1804. At an early age his father moved the family to St. Louis. There, soon after, Jim lost both his father and mother and was apprenticed as a blacksmith's helper.

In 1822, when he was eighteen, he started his first fur-trapping expedition to the Great Falls of the Missouri with the famous Ashley-Henry expedition. In a few years he became partial owner of this same company now called the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. His associates at this time reads like a roll of the Western great explorers, among them being Jed Smith, Jim Beckworth, Kit Carson and many others.

Bridger could neither read nor write, so left no records. As a consequence, his contribution to Western history was not immediately recognized. He discovered Great Salt Lake, the South Pass over the Rocky Mountains, Yellowstone Park. He was instrumental in the establishing of the Overland and Oregan trails, was a trusted scout and guide on many Army exploration expeditions.

In 1843, he left the fur trade and built famous Fort Bridger in Wyoming. He served valiantly and well in most of the Northern Indian wars of the period, and he was the first to tell Brigham Young of the Salt Lake Valley. Later, Bridger became the Army's Chief of Scouts on the plains, fighting Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians. Dodge picked him as chief scout of the Union Pacific Railroad.

Bridger died in St. Louis in 1881, a life span that took in almost every phase of the development of the Far West.

DURING the first cool hours of the morning, the Rio Kid drove the party at a fast clip. Later, when the sun beat down, their progress would be slow as the Rio Kid wanted to spend as little time as possible in these badlands. The miles quickly reeled off behind them.

They rode around the spur of a low ridge about an hour before noon. The Rio Kid drew rein and Saber impatiently champed at the bit. Mary and Celestino grouped around him and Peewee Barton held his ratty paint horse a few feet to the rear.

The Rio Kid pointed down into the valley and the long stretch of black, jumbled rock.

"There's the worst stretch of all," he said. "Beyond that range over there lies Little Salt Lake and a settlement."

Mary's violet-blue eyes narrowed against the sun. Her face lighted.

"It won't be long before I'll know

about Father," she breathed.

The Rio Kid smiled. "That's right. And, Barton, yuh'll soon be safe."

He twisted around in the saddle to look at the little man. He caught Peewee's baleful glare as he stared at Mary Fitzhugh. The Rio Kid's eyes narrowed in his harsh, tanned face.

"What's eatin' yuh, Barton?" he demanded.

The little man abruptly erased all trace of emotion from his pinched face. He shrugged and rubbed his stomach.

"I—I reckon it was somethin' I ate. I've shore felt mean all mornin'."

The Rio Kid's hard stare was probing and puzzled. Finally he turned again toward the valley before him. Suspicion flamed in his mind and he determined to watch Peewee Barton. That look had been caused by hate, and not by the chow they'd had for breakfast.

He caught Celestino's sharp glance and made a slight gesture with his hand, hidden from Peewee.

The Rio Kid touched Saber lightly with the spurs and the party started forward, down the trail toward the black lava beds. Mary Fitzhugh was just behind him.

Celestino suddenly had trouble with his horse and by the time he had the mount lined out, he was behind Peewee Barton. The little man twisted around and gave him a scowl, but he said nothing, and made no attempt to maneuver the young Mexican out of position.

Celestino's dark eyes grew sharp and his lips thinned in a harsh line. His right hand dropped carelessly and hung close to his holster.

The trail finally leveled out and led straight toward the lava beds. The black rock extended for miles on all sides, jumbled and forbidding, sharp as glass. It would cut a man's boots or a horse's feet to pieces in a few yards of hard running across it.

Some time in the past, a Mormon emmigrant train to the south had blasted and worked a fairly smooth trail through the malpais, though it twisted and turned like a snake in agony.

They were right at the edge of the old lava flow when the Rio Kid felt the abrupt trembling shiver along Saber's back. His hand dropped down to his Colt and he reined in the horse sharply. There was close and pressing danger. The dun had never been wrong in that warning shiver.

Bob Pryor's keen blue eyes searched ahead. There was no sign of life.

Mary spoke behind him. "Is there anything wrong?"

"I don't know," the Rio Kid answered, without turning his head. "Saber thinks there is."

Peewee's sharp voice sounded from behind them.

"What are we waitin' for? I don't see anything."

THE Rio Kid kept searching the jumble of jagged black teeth that stretched ahead. The trail, to its first turning, was clear and nothing living stirred anywhere in sight. Celestino was tense and alert, but the girl and Peewee were impatient to get on.

Mary looked around the broken lava beds, and sighed.

"We can't just stay here, Captain Pryor. Either we go through the malpais or circle it."

The Rio Kid nodded, his jaw muscles tight under the skin.

"I know that, and we haven't got water and supplies enough to take the long way around. We'll have to chance the danger Saber senses."

He touched the dun lightly and started slowly up the trail. His eyes darted from one side to the other and up the trail. He seemed to notice each little crack and crevice in the jumble that gradually reached out and surrounded them as they went forward.

Mary Fitzhugh followed close behind. Celestino and Peewee Martin rode side by side. The Mexican kept twisting around to watch the back trail. His face had hardened and his hand clawed out, hovering over his gun.

Peewee rode slouched and easy, but his own hand was not far from his holster. He kept his eyes on Mary's back.

For a while there was nothing that gave any sign of danger. Still Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, did not relax. He still felt the continuous shiver up Saber's back and his own muscles quivered with an electric tingle. There was death in the hot desert wind, and both the Rio Kid and the magnificent mount he rode sensed it.

His quick, keen eyes caught the swift movement. The sun had glinted off the

bright steel of a rifle sight. Instantly the Rio Kid's hand blurred down and the big cavalry pistol flashed up and roared. The slug whined off the basalt rock a scant second before the rifle flashed.

The Rio Kid was in motion. The bullet whispered close to his cheek.

Instantly rifle fire sounded in a wide circle around them. Mary Fitzhugh's horse screamed and reared as a leaden slug slapped into its chest. The girl made a wild grab for the saddle-horn and caught it. Her sudden movement spoiled Peewee Barton's shot. It whistled over her shoulder as the horse came up high, and buried itself in the mount's brain. Horse and rider crashed to earth.

The Rio Kid swung Saber off to the left. He had caught sight of a man in Mexican dress, with a six-gun in his hand. As the dun galloped closer the Rio Kid recognized the man as a cheap outlaw he had several times run across, and saw the breed tear a reward poster with his own picture on it off the trunk of a tree.

"So yuh're one of 'em, Manuel!" shouted the Rio Kid. "Drop that gun."

The man he called Manuel turned just as the Rio Kid fired over his shoulder, the bullet knocking the gun from the half-breed's hand. Manuel cursed, as he let the reward poster flutter to the ground. His left hand came up with a gun that had been hidden, roaring. Pryor put a bullet in the half-breed's heart as Manuel's bullet whistled by the Rio Kid's left ear.

Celestino's draw had been almost as fast as the Rio Kid's. He blasted a .45 at the flash of a bearded face. The man threw up his arms and his rifle slid uselessly down the rock slope.

Pryor's young Mexican companion whirled in time to see Peewee's second shot at Mary Fitzhugh. For a split second, Celestino was stunned by surprise. The little man rocked back the gun hammer again. Celestino spurred forward, his gun blurring up. His shot came a scant second before Peewee could line down on the fallen girl.

CELESTINO'S heavy slug caught the little man in the shoulder and drove him from the saddle. He fell sprawling and the ratty paint broke loose in panic, streaking back down the trail.

The Rio Kid swung out of saddle.

"Hit the rocks!" he yelled.

Crouching low, he ran toward Mary Fitzhugh. Bullets sang in the air about him and once he stumbled as a slug ripped a long furrow across his thigh.

Celestino sent slugs roaring into the lava, trying to cover his friend's bold charge. His sombrero sailed from his head as ambusher lead centered on him from the rear. Celestino crouched lower, his lips drawn back over his white teeth in an angry, determined snarl.

When his gun was emptied he snatched another from the wide sash around his waist.

The Rio Kid had reached the fallen girl. Working quickly, he freed her foot from the twisted stirrup. Mary was shaken and dizzy. A bullet thumped into the dead horse and Bob Pryor shook the girl to bring her around.

At last the glazed look left the violet-blue eyes and she started to scramble to her feet. The Rio Kid pulled her down.

"Keep low. We're hittin' for cover."

She scurried after him. He turned and sent lead screaming back while Mary ran to Celestino. The Mexican youth had retreated to a pocket in the lava rock and his eager hand pulled the girl to cover.

The next instant the Rio Kid came tumbling over the barricade to drop to the comparative safety of the ground beyond the rocks. Lead whined and sang off the rock as the disappointed ambushers poured a concentrated fire on the fort.

The Rio Kid twisted to his feet and crouched at a crack in the rock. His narrowed eyes watched a moment and his wide lips were an angry slash across his face.

"There must be a dozen of 'em," he snapped. "They shore aimed to mark us for Boot Hill."

Celestino sent a shot blasting toward the attackers. He turned, a grim smile on his face.

"*Si*, my General. And thees Barton, he try to back-shoot the senorita. I myself saw him."

The Rio Kid turned in amazement. "Tried to kill her!" His puzzled blue eyes sought the girl. "Why? Do you know him?"

The stunned expression on her face was answer enough. His long jaw tight-

ened and his eyes grew bleak and cold.

"There's a lot I don't savvy, but we've ridden into a murder jackpot."

Mary pulled herself together. She reached out her hand.

"Give me a gun. I guess I'm the reason for the attack, though I don't know why. I got you into this, Captain Pryor, I can do my part to help you fight out of it."

The Rio Kid's eyes lighted in sudden admiration. His grim lips relaxed in a smile. Without a word he pulled a hideout gun from a shoulder holster and extended it to her.

"Yuh're only part of the reason, Mary," he told her. "But I reckon we can argue that out after we've driven off the sidewinders. Yuh can use it?"

She nodded, but the weapon looked gigantic in her slender hand.

"I've fired guns," she assured.

Celestino turned a strained face.

"*Por Dios,* shoot, senorita! These hombres come!"

## CHAPTER V

### *Message from the Leader*

THE Rio Kid threw himself at the rock loophole. Celestino was right. He saw several figures darting from rock to rock, keeping up a steady fire at the barricade. Each short run brought the attackers a little closer.

From the rock fortress, three guns blasted defiance at the renegades. The Rio Kid fired with deadly accuracy. Two men were dead and a third badly wounded before the men halted their attack.

Celestino drew back and wiped the sweat from his face. He grinned at the dust-streaked girl and the grim Rio Kid.

"They have it the lead stomachs, no?"

The Rio Kid silently nodded. He wondered what the mysterious attackers would do next. Mary sank wearily against the rocks, her gun hand lying slack. Suddenly she started up.

"What about the horses?"

Bob Pryor smiled. "Saber will take care of hisself. Might do a little fightin' on his own."

The girl's eyes looked puzzled and Celestino chuckled. Abruptly he held up his hand in a silencing gesture. The Rio Kid and Mary listened for sound beyond the rocks. They heard it, the loud snorting of a fighting horse and the frightened squeal of others. They heard profane shouts from the men in the rocks. The Rio Kid laughed.

"That's Saber," he said proudly.

He limped to the loop-hole in the rocks and peered out. The renegades were scurrying back the way they had come. The three in the rocks sent lead screaming after them. The sound of equine battle mounted and the Rio Kid's keen eyes caught the flash of Saber's dun coat far off among the black rocks.

"Saber's stampedin' their hosses!" the Rio Kid shouted at Celestino. "We'd better move fast before somebody puts a bullet in his hide."

The two men jumped over the rock barricade and, crouching, ran forward. They twisted and turned among the black rocks, the heavy Colts in their hands ready for instant action. They heard the thud of hoofs and the loud cursing of men who tried to hold their mounts.

The Rio Kid came to a plunging halt at the edge of a fairly level circle in the rocks. Here the renegades had staked their horses for the surprise attack on the Rio Kid's party. It was filled now with milling men and rearing, snorting horses. Saber darted and slashed in the center of them, his wicked yellow teeth gleaming as he ripped at flanks and shoulders.

Celestino came running to the Rio Kid's side. Without a word the two men opened up with their sixes. The slugs whined into the mêlée, searching out the renegades. The Rio Kid saw a giant of a man turn in snarling surprise.

From this distance, Pryor could see little more than the thick, black beard and the battered broad-brimmed hat that shaded the big fellow's face.

The giant slammed shots back toward the Rio Kid and they were close. Then he shouted something to his men, swung into the kak, and spurred his horse away from the lava beds. In a few moments the sound of fleeing hoofs faded into the distance.

The Rio Kid straightened, holstering his Colt. Saber pranced alone in the

little circular basin, snorting and pawing, his ears pricked up, his mane tossing in triumph. The Rio Kid smiled grimly and whistled a bar of "Said the Big Black Charger." Instantly the dun horse turned and came trotting toward him.

OF THE band that had jumped them, the Rio Kid counted three dead and a fourth in that deep coma that precedes death. He turned from them and helped Mary climb over the rocks and back to the trail.

They found Peewee Barton painfully trying to crawl away. The Rio Kid's face became grim.

"Now we'll find out what this is all about," he said.

He reached the little man just as Barton collapsed, his face buried in the dust. The Rio Kid rolled him over. Barton's shoulder had been smashed by Celestino's slug, but there was another ugly wound in the chest. Blood bubbles came to the man's lips.

Barton opened his watery eyes and looked up at the Rio Kid. His thin lips drew back in a painful grimace.

"Yuh—ain't tallied this time," he breathed. "But—but yuh can't always be lucky."

"Who's behind this?" the Rio Kid demanded. "Why did yuh try to kill Mary?"

Barton's head rolled to one side. Then his eyes flickered open.

"The girl's—got a bullet—made for her. Fitzhugh—" He broke off gasping for breath. His fingers clawed slackly at the wound in his chest. "She can't live. She's got to—die."

The frail body abruptly stiffened and a look of pain came over the pinched features. Then Peewee Barton collapsed again—for good.

The Rio Kid lowered the body to the dust. He looked up at Celestino and at Mary Fitzhugh's drawn, white face. He stood up, thoughtful.

"It's still a mystery." He looked hard at his friends, his face unusually grave. "We don't know why, but everyone of us is marked for death. Mary, in some way yore father's disappearance and my job in Corinne are hooked up. I shore aim to find out why."

Celestino shrugged. "General, the answer she is in Corinne, no?"

The Rio Kid turned away. "Yes. I'll round up the hosses and we'll ride—pronto."

They rode away from the scene of an ambush that had nearly been successful. Their faces were frowning, thoughtful, as each tried to find an answer to the puzzle.

The Rio Kid grimly remembered the giant renegade with the thick black beard. Somewhere along the trail he and that man would meet again—in gunsmoke.

Not long after they left the lava beds, the little party came to the edge of the desert.

The sight of green things was pleasant to all three riders after the miles of sere and blasting desert.

Celestino became more cheerful and even Mary shook off the feeling of fear that had settled over her heart. The horses seemed to take on more life and their speed increased.

From here to Salt Lake City they rode without further molestation or even sign that they were being watched. But the Rio Kid did not believe that their mysterious enemies were through with

*"The Valley is Swarming with Sioux—and They've Trapped the Wagon Train"*

COLONEL CARRINGTON'S report was no surprise to the Rio Kid. A great massacre was in progress! A hundred warriors were howling in triumph as they wrought deeds of violence.

THEN THE RIO KID plunges into one of the many thunderous, roaring fights that pack INDIAN OUTPOST, a gripping book-length frontier action novel by Tom Curry, with thrills and excitement from start to finish!

COMING NEXT ISSUE

them. That black-bearded outlaw would bide his time and strike when he thought best.

So Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, did not relax his vigilance. He waited for the next play to come.

Riding along the roads between the neat Mormon farms, it was hard to believe that not long before they had battled for their lives and that men had been killed. They rode through prosperous little settlements, villages that should have been back in New England rather than in this wide valley, bounded by the rugged Rockies to the east, and the desert to the west and south.

At last, toward evening, they rode into Salt Lake City, the capital of the old State of Deseret. It was a busy place, a city still in the process of being built.

They put up at one of the many hotels and the Rio Kid and Celestino went immediately to their room.

NOT much later, with the dust of travel washed off, and freshly shaved, the Rio Kid stood at the window looking toward the scaffolding that marked the work on the Tabernacle. He felt renewed vigor through his lithe body and was anxious to get on to Corinne and report to General Dodge.

But he felt that Mary Fitzhugh should have at least a day's rest, so they would not leave Salt Lake until the day after tomorrow. That would put them at Dodge's headquarters on the fourth, with a day to spare.

Celestino stretched out on the bed, luxuriating in a brown cigarette. There came a knock on the door and the Rio Kid turned from the window. His quick eyes jumped from the door to Celestino. The Mexican youth shrugged, slipped from the bed and walked to one side of the door. His hand was close to a gunbelt looped over a chair.

He smiled, made a quick slashing motion with his hand and signaled the Rio Kid to open the door. Bob Pryor crossed the room in his lithe stride. Swinging the door open, he looked into the face of a pudgy man who peered at him through thick glasses. The man smiled uncertainly and tapped the hard brim of his hat against his stubby fingers.

"Captain Pryor?" he asked hopefully.

The Rio Kid nodded. "I'm Captain Pryor."

The little man looked immensely relieved. He had a moon face, smooth except for a ragged fringe of pale hair under his chin that looped up in twin circles to meet his ears. He glanced inside the room, then up at the lean-faced, blue-clad Rio Kid.

"Could I come in? I have a message for you."

The Rio Kid stepped aside and signaled Celestino to forget the gun. The young Mexican stepped aside and the fat little man jumped, his mild eyes growing round. He recovered himself, pulled his black frock coat-tails up and sat down, precisely, in a straight-backed chair.

He beamed at the Rio Kid who waited, his face still showing suspicion.

"I have come in the name of Brother Brigham Young," the visitor said then. "Would you be so kind as to meet him at the Beehive House in the morning, say at ten?"

The Rio Kid looked startled, then his eyes narrowed.

"How did yuh know I'd come to Salt Lake?"

The chubby face beamed and the fat shoulders moved up toward the pointed ears.

"We have ways of knowing, Captain Pryor. Brother Brigham wants to discuss certain matters concerning the Union Pacific Railroad. He will be most happy if you'll be punctual at the minute. His day is well filled, you know."

The little man arose, bowed courteously to the Rio Kid and to Celestino. He beamed at them again and walked out of the room, closing the door softly behind him.

Both men stood staring at the blank panels, then the Rio Kid flung his arms out in a puzzled gesture. He strode angrily to the window.

"Dodge tells me this is to be secret," he growled. "Yet everybody in Utah seems to know where I'm goin'—and why. My old cavalry troop would have attracted less attention."

Celestino sank thoughtfully on the bed. "General, I theenk troubles they pile up. Only maybeso we don't see them, no?"

The Rio Kid's fingers drummed impatiently on the window-sill. His voice still held anger.

"In Mexico, they say *'Quien sabe,'*

Celestino. Me, I'm figgerin' that way, too."

## CHAPTER VI

### *War Talk*

NEXT morning at ten, the Rio Kid presented himself at the columned Beehive House. He was immediately ushered into an office where a big man sat behind a desk. Brigham Young stood up and extended his hand.

He was large and solidly built. His face was square and firm, his mouth stern, the lower lip projecting beyond the upper, giving the impression that his mouth was pressed tight to guard his words. A small mole ended the deep line from the strong nose. His eyes were slightly narrow but the look was direct, deep and grave. His hair was long, coming down over his ears.

"Thank you, Captain, for coming to see me," he said. His voice was strong and friendly. "I have recently been to Corinne and talked to General Dodge. He told me you would probably be through Salt Lake City, so I planned to have a talk with you."

The Rio Kid sank back in the chair, relieved that Dodge himself had told the big man behind the desk he was expected. At least, this interview was not the sign of another leak of information.

Brigham Young adjusted his black string tie, then folded his powerful hands on the desk.

"General Dodge," he said, "will explain many aspects of the Union Pacific problem in detail, Captain Pryor. I am interested in only one thing. I feel that the railroad division point should be Ogden and there is quite a lot of pressure, both legal and otherwise, to make it Corinne."

Bob Pryor looked puzzled. "I don't see how I can help, Mr. Young."

The stern lips showed the shadow of a smile.

"From what Dodge tells me and from information I have from other sources, you are about the only man who can help, Pryor. The forces working for Corinne are behind the lawless element that is crippling Dodge. They're land grabbers and speculators and I have reason to believe there has been a big investment in Corinne. To save that money, Corinne must be division point at all costs."

Pryor nodded slowly and his keen blue eyes met the big man's steady gaze. "Why, in your opinion, is Ogden the logical town?" he asked.

Brigham Young chuckled approvingly.

"I like a direct question like that, Captain Pryor. It gets to the heart of the problem. Corinne lies up around the head of Salt Lake. Ogden is at the head of the farming settlements that lie southward in a slow curve almost to the Arizona border. When I have developed our Dixie, Utah's wealth will extend right to the border. A branch line from Ogden would be the shortest route to get our produce to the railroad and Eastern markets. On the other hand, if Corinne is selected we would be forced to send much of our produce by lake boats to that city. In that case a spur line south would be unprofitable."

The Rio Kid nodded. "I can see that. But wouldn't boat shipments be cheaper?"

The big lion head nodded in agreement. Young lifted a finger in warning, a gesture that was typically his own.

"Right now it would be cheaper," he agreed. "But the lake boats are owned by Corinne speculators. If we of central Utah cannot have a rail line, we will be at their mercy. We will be forced to meet freight rates that will be sky-high. Through middleman and speculators, Corinne will control all of Utah's wealth. I cannot have that, Captain."

The Rio Kid shifted. "What do yuh want me to do?"

Young shrugged his massive shoulders. "Work for Dodge, find out who is behind the lawlessness that is holding up his work. I believe you'll find the same man or men behind, who are the powers fighting me. If so, break them and expose them. I would be eternally grateful."

The Rio Kid arose and picked up his hat.

"I'll see what can be done," he promised. "But remember General Dodge is the one who is hirin' me, and my first duty is to him."

BRIGHAM YOUNG arose, smiling. He extended his hand across the desk.

"I know that, Captain, and I appreciate your loyalty. But I believe you will be working for both of us. Good luck to you, sir. I shall tell my people to help you all they can."

The Rio Kid left the Beehive House, his mind busy with the new angles that Brigham Young had presented. He walked slowly along the streets back to the hotel, a trim, lithe figure in dark blue that smacked of the cavalry troops.

Not far behind him, a man in a slouch hat beneath which were narrowed eyes, picked up his trail. The man followed the Rio Kid for several squares, taking advantage of the crowds along the walks before the stores. When Pryor at last turned toward his hotel, the shadow turned and hurried back the way he had come.

He walked fast and at last turned into a small eating place. He blinked his squint eyes against the shadows for a moment, then saw Black Judkins seated at a table toward the rear of the room. He hurried over to the bearded giant.

Judkins' green eyes flashed up. "Well, Curly?"

"Curly" threw himself in a chair and ordered coffee.

"I been watchin' that Rio Kid all mornin'," he reported. "Him and Brigham Young had a confab. He just got back."

Judkins' narrow forehead creased in a scowl and his big fingers clenched on the table.

"I figgered somethin' like that would happen. We ain't goin' to have a chance to salivate him now till he reaches Corinne—nor that girl, either. But up there—" He broke off and smiled, his green eyes glinting avidly.

Curly leaned forward. "Yuh reckon Todd'll want him planted?"

Judkins grinned wider, and nodded his shaggy head. "Yeah, Todd will. If he don't, the jasper behind Todd, the kingpin, will. We shore are workin' for big things, Curly, and there ain't no hombre can stand in the way."

Curly rubbed his hands together, grinning. "Yuh want I should trail the Rio Kid some more?"

Judkins shook his head and stood up. "No, ain't no use. You and me will burn the trail to Corinne. I reckon Todd'll have somethin' hot for that blasted Rio Kid when he gets there. Let's ride, Curly."

Back at the hotel, the Rio Kid told Celestino of his visit with Brigham Young. The young Mexican listened, his dark eyes lighting and his lips smiling.

"General," he observed, "thees Corinne she weel be nice place, I think. We buy more bullets, no?"

The Rio Kid shrugged his wide shoulders. "Mebbe, *amigo*. Sometimes snakes take a heap of killin'."

The next morning they rode out of Salt Lake. Mary Fitzhugh was completely rested, beautiful and sparkling. The ride to Ogden went without incident, and there they caught a work-train going on into Corinne. Just beyond was the end of track as the rails drove westward to make a junction with the Central Pacific coming east from California.

The railroad ride was not long and at last the train pulled into Corinne. The Rio Kid's quick, keen eyes instantly judged the town for what it was. Right now, it was mostly tents, mile on mile of canvas that stretched up and down the banks of the Bear River toward the Great Salt Lake to the south.

Its main street was lined with stores, saloons and honky tonks. Gamblers, gunmen, dance-hall girls mingled on the plank sidewalks with engineers, tracklayers, businessmen and soberly-clad Mormons who looked with disapproval at the wild life of the town.

ALONG the deep-channeled Bear crude levies provided landing for the Lake boats that came upstream to unload their cargoes at the flimsy warehouses. To the west of town stretched the immense canvas warehouses that held the materials and supplies for the Union Pacific. Everywhere was movement and crowds. The very air seemed to crackle with the eagerness of men making and losing fortunes.

Mary Fitzhugh walked between Celestino and the Rio Kid as they hunted for a hotel. They finally found one of canvas run by a bland-faced, motherly Irish woman. The Rio Kid saw that Mary was provided with a room and he gave her warning.

"Don't wander around the streets. Co-

## BRIGHAM YOUNG

BRIGHAM YOUNG, the second and greatest leader of the Mormons, was born in 1801, in Whittingham, Vermont. He joined Joseph Smith, the spiritual leader of the Mormons, in 1832, and became a member of the Quorum of Twelve in 1835. He was with the church when it was established in Ohio, and moved with Joseph Smith and his persecuted followers to Nauvoo, in Illinois.

As the trouble between Mormon and Gentile increased, Brigham Young's influence grew. In 1844, the trouble culminated in the killing of Joseph Smith. Brigham Young was elected as President of the Quorum of Twelve. Smith had long been interested in the far Western lands and Brigham Young now decided that the Mormons could find peace only outside the boundaries of the United States.

He led his followers west, and settled them in the Great Salt Lake Valley of Utah. In time, through the California gold rush and westward expansion, the Mormons again found themselves in trouble with the Federal authorities.

Brigham Young planned carefully and fought well for his people. He became their strength, striking back hard at the enemies of his faith. He became a legendary and frightful figure to many millions in the country during his time but, undaunted by threat of jail and death, he fought to establish his people and his church.

He died at Salt Lake City August 29, 1877.

rinne is lawless and we know already that somebody wants yuh out of the way. That's why Barton tried to kill yuh. As soon as I report to General Dodge, I'll come back and we'll look up yore uncle."

She smiled and thanked him. "I'll stay right here, Captain Pryor," she said.

With Celestino beside him, the Rio Kid walked up the planked sidewalk, his keen eyes missing no face in the crowd, noting the buildings, the number of saloons and gambling halls, some of them housed under huge tents. At last, he spotted a painted sign nailed to a two-storied frame building.

He cut across the busy street to the construction offices of the Union Pacific Railroad. A constant stream of men and workers flowed in and out of the narrow doors. The Rio Kid and Celestino pushed inside and a harrassed clerk took their names.

His eyes widened when the Rio Kid announced himself.

"Yes, Captain Pryor. The General has been waiting for you. You're to go right in."

He opened a gate in the wooden counter and led the Rio Kid and Celestino back through a row of busy desks to a closed door. A painted sign read:

G. M. DODGE, CHIEF ENGINEER

The clerk knocked, and a heavy voice called: "Come in."

The Rio Kid and Celestino entered a large room lighted by three tall windows. A long drafting board stood against one wall and in the corner was a desk, piled high with work, but still neat and orderly. The man behind the desk smiled, jumped up and came toward the Rio Kid.

"Captain Pryor! I'm glad you came."

General Grenville M. Dodge was young, not quite forty, but already he had served with distinction through the Civil War and had active years of railroad building behind him. His movements were quick, his voice hard and decisive. Sparkling eyes gleamed from beneath deep, overhanging brows. His forehead was high, his nose straight. His cheeks were a little sunken, so that the bone structure of his face was noticeable. His mouth, even in repose, had the preciseness of a commander and engineer.

He acknowledged his introduction to Celestino and immediately turned to the Rio Kid. He approvingly eyed the crossed gun-belts.

"Are you still fast with those sixes?" he asked.

The Rio Kid shrugged. "I think so."

Dodge nodded quickly. "Good. You've got a job. You're to be deputy marshal of Corinne. Report to Dan Ryan up the street. He'll give you a badge and you can get right to work."

Bob Pryor smiled. "That's pretty fast, General. I reckon I'd better know more about the job first."

DODGE talked rapidly and precisely as he signed his name to letters piled on his desk.

"I want the fangs of Todd Tolliver pulled," he explained. "I not only want him rendered harmless, but I want to know the identity of the man behind him."

The Rio Kid's eyes widened. "Tolliver! Wasn't he a pardner to Major Fitzhugh?"

Dodge looked up under his deep brows. "Was. Fitzhugh disappeared about a year back. How did you know?"

"Major Fitzhugh's daughter rode in with me from St. George. She's lookin' for her father."

Dodge laid down his pen in precise alignment with the desk.

"I take it she's not satisfied with Tolliver's explanation?" he queried.

The Rio Kid nodded. "Somethin' like that. She wants to find out."

Dodge rubbed his hand along his jaw and tugged thoughtfully at the short but thick beard he wore.

"Tolliver's fighting me tooth and nail," he said. "I believe he has invested money in Central Pacific, hoping to regain it on land subsidies. For every mile of track I lay, the Central Pacific loses a section of land and that hurts Tolliver. That's why I believe him to be behind the trouble I'm having."

"What kind of trouble?" the Rio Kid asked.

"Supplies are being stolen, for one thing. I've doubled the guard at the warehouses, but there are still leaks. I find the death rate among my foremen is pretty high. Six-gun poisoning mostly. Several times there have been regular mob fights here in Corinne and my work crews have been laid up. My boys are tough Irishmen, but they can still get crippled."

The Rio Kid's keen blue eyes gleamed. "I begin to understand my job."

Dodge quickly raised his hand in a warning gesture.

"You'll be a deputy, Pryor, but you won't side Dan Ryan on his rounds—only now and then. I'm depending on you to get to Tolliver. He's surrounded by a crew of tough gunhawks and he's as slick and sly as they come. It's not an easy job, but it's yours."

Bob Pryor nodded. "In Salt Lake, Brigham Young talked to me about a division point at Ogden. He hinted that some powerful interests were behind the moves to make Corinne the choice."

When It's Showdown Time in Trailbend, Deputy Bob Wilson Proves He's a Better Lawman than Most Folks Think—in BULLET BONDS, by Cliff Walters, Next Issue!

"I think the same thing," Dodge said promptly, "and I believe the same man is behind the move to slow me. Whoever he is, he's playing for the land subsidies and at the same time playing for a corner of Utah's produce shipments east and west." He dropped his hands flat on the desk and looked straight at the Rio Kid. "So there's the job lined out for you. I'm giving no orders. You'll be on your own. If you're interested, report to Dan Ryan."

The Rio Kid grinned and arose. He shifted his gun-belts around his waist.

"Where do I find Marshal Ryan?" he drawled.

Dodge grinned up at him and his eyes sparked.

"Down the street about a block. He'll show you around Corinne and tell you the angles, but he's not to be your boss. You are directly responsible to me. I'll look you up when we can have time for a real visit and a talk over old times, Captain."

THE Rio Kid jammed his hat on his head and turned toward the door. Celestino followed him. He was about to leave when Dodge stopped him.

"I've got an old Indian-hunter scout coming in, Pryor," he informed. "He's tough as rawhide and a good man despite his age. I'll bring him around. His name's Jim Bridger."

The Rio Kid halted and his blue eyes gleamed.

"I'll be mighty proud to work with him, General. *Adios.*"

They pushed their way through the crowded office to the street. Outside, the Rio Kid halted and studied the crowd that moved along the sidewalk. His face lifted and his blue eyes circled the false-front stores and the canvas that spread out on every side. His nostrils dilated and his shoulders came back a little straighter.

Celestino rolled a brown paper cigarette and looked up at the Rio Kid from the corner of his eyes.

"We buy extra bullets, my General?"

The Rio Kid nodded, his eyes still roaming over the street of the wild town, known throughout the West as "the burg on the Bear."

"I reckon we do, Celestino. The General was handin' out war talk—and he meant it."

## CHAPTER VII

### *Outlaw Tamer*

UNCONSCIOUSLY, the Rio Kid loosened the Colts in his holster and turned to walk down the street with his long, lithe stride. Celestino followed a little to the rear, his dark eyes quick and searching as he watched the crowd. They pushed their way along the crowded walks, crossed two streets churned by the broad tires of the heavy freighters.

Halfway down the next block the sudden rap of shots brought them up short, hands dropping down toward gun butts. The Rio Kid whirled to face a tent saloon across the street. The shots sounded again and suddenly men streamed madly out the wide opening that formed the portal. Girls in scanty, spangled skirts screamed and pushed themselves out of the line of gunfire.

For a moment silence held the crowd. Then a single sharp roar sounded inside the tent. The Rio Kid could see the peering faces grow tense. He edged through the crowd, with Celestino pressing close behind him. The crowd surged back as a man appeared.

He was big and red-faced, and his sun wrinkles were deep-etched. His jaw was underslung and his nose a pug button that separated two hard, cold gray eyes. He held a gun in one hand and dragged an unconscious man with the other. A badge glittered brightly on his faded shirt pocket.

Outside the tent he stopped and dropped the man. The man lay still, his slack, evil-marked face staring up into the sunlight. A scalp wound was a red welt along his temple. The man with the badge stared belligerently around at the crowd. When he spoke, his voice was a rasping growl.

"Would another of yez black-hearted buzzards be achin' to side the likes of him?"

He stood strong and stocky in the sunlight, his circling eyes a bold challenge. His sleeves were rolled high on thick arms covered with a light red fuzz. His

big hand held the Colt cocked and ready. There were no takers and he cuffed his battered black hat back out of his eyes.

"Then I'll be takin' him to the cooler where he can be thinkin' of his sins. I'll be warnin' the rest of ye there ain't a bucko in Corinne can break the law and get by with it!"

He bent down and the Rio Kid stepped forward. The marshal whirled instantly, his gun jumping up to line on the Rio Kid's stomach.

"And what would yez be wantin'?" he demanded.

The Rio Kid grinned down into the black muzzle of the threatening Colt.

"To give yuh a lift, Dan Ryan. I'm Bob Pryor."

Ryan's gray eyes lost their hardness and instantly he holstered his gun. He shot out his big hand.

"Shure and I've been watchin' for the likes of ye. We'll be talkin' when I get this cold chicken safely iced away."

He bent down and got a firm grip on the unconscious man's collar. The Rio Kid moved to help him, but Dan Ryan waved him away.

"Shure and it's hard on a man's pride to drag his heels through the dust to the jail. It takes the cockiness out of him and makes the others think twice. We'll handle this bucko that way."

He started walking, the Rio Kid and Celestino flanking him. Dan Ryan chose the middle of the dusty street so that all the men along the sidewalks could see the gunman being dragged off to jail.

The jail was a thick-logged structure with narrow, barred windows to the rear. Ryan's office was in front, a grilled and locked door separating it from the cells in back. He threw the gunny in one of the cells, clanged the door and locked it.

He came back and sank into a chair behind the spur-scarred desk. The Rio Kid waited by one of the windows, and Celestino lounged in the door watching the never-ending flow of people and wagons along the street.

WHEN Dan Ryan entered, the Rio Kid turned and pushed his Stetson back on his chestnut hair.

"I've just seen General Dodge," he explained. "He told me what the trouble is and sent me over to you."

Ryan pulled a pipe from his pocket and started filling it. His Irish eyes studied the Rio Kid from head to toe and he seemed to like what he saw.

"Shure," he remarked, "and I've heard of the Rio Kid a hundred times. Now by the cut and size of yez, I can well believe what I've heard. By the saints, yez should have your fill of adventure in this town."

The Rio Kid smiled. "I probably will."

Ryan fished in the desk and pulled out a badge. He pitched it to the Rio Kid who caught it with a quick movement of his hand.

"Yez'll be pinnin' that on yer blue shirt and yez'll be a deputy marshal of Corinne, the town that has a man for breakfast every mornin'."

The Rio Kid pinned the badge to his shirt pocket, then sat down in a rickety chair.

"Dodge told me about a certain Todd Tolliver," he began. "What's he like?"

Ryan puffed on his pipe. "I'll show the black bucko to yez in the U.P. Saloon. I'd like to put my hands on him but he's been too slick. He'll slip some day, though."

The Rio Kid hitched forward. "Do yuh know a big black-bearded gunhawk with a loud bellerin' voice?" He went on to tell of the attack on himself and his party in the malpais.

The marshal listened, letting his pipe go out. When the Rio Kid had finished, he stared thoughtfully out the window.

"Did this bearded owlhooter have cold, green eyes?" he finally asked.

Bob Pryor shook his head. "I don't know. I didn't get close enough to him to see."

Dan Ryan sighed. "Shore, he's learnin' smart tricks from Todd. Now this Barton yez told me about would be Peewee Barton, one of Tolliver's gunslingers and a deadly little imp of Satan he was. 'Twas good riddance, his killin' . . . Now I've got me breath, we'll go see Tolliver."

He arose and circled the desk and the Rio Kid followed him out to the street. They walked about half a block and Ryan stopped, pointing to another of the big gambling tents and saloons. A big sign that stretched across its top read:

U. P. SALOON—GAMES—GIRLS

"Tolliver runs that cesspool," Ryan explained. "His supply store is on the

next street and he has a dozen other dirty pots a-boilin'. We'll most likely find the gentleman here—also his bearded *segundo,* Black Judkins. I'd be bettin' he's the bandit that set upon yez."

They mingled with the crowd and worked their way into the saloon. Under the high canvas, it looked immense. It was divided by canvas walls into rooms, the first big one being the bar. It was crowded, the men standing four deep at the long mahogany bar that stretched the full length of the room. To one side was a wide opening that gave onto the gaming room. The click of wheels and dice was a constant undertone to the talk that filled the tent.

Dan Ryan walked with sturdy nonchalance among men who would have welcomed the chance to cut him down. The Rio Kid caught several hate-filled glances darted at the marshal's broad back. His own lips tightened and he began to realize the size of the task General Dodge had given him.

TOWARD the back of the card tables Ryan found Todd Tolliver. The man was tall and gaunt, his face smooth-shaven, the long jaw as hard as a steel trap. His bloodless lips were a straight line across his long, sallow face and his eyes were dark, shallow and suspicious. He wore a gun-belt under his long black coat and his shirt front was spotlessly white. He looked up at the marshal's hail and his eyes fastened on the badge the Rio Kid wore. Dan Ryan chuckled as the thin lips pulled downward in an angry gesture.

"Shore, Todd, and there's another of us to make yez toe the mark. This is the Rio Kid."

Tolliver pulled a thin cheroot from between his pale lips. His voice was soft and low, but there was a deadly menace to its monotone.

"I can't say I'm pleased to meet yuh."

The Rio Kid's sharp eyes glittered. "I imagine not," he said, "after yore boys failed north of St. George."

Tolliver's thin brows arched up toward his bald skull. "I've no notion what yuh mean."

The Rio Kid shrugged and let the matter drop. He looked around the big room and then his eyes came back to Tolliver.

"I reckon you and me better get our loops clear before we start," he said then. "I won't be makin' the rounds with Dan. I'm after bigger fry."

Tolliver puffed slowly on the cheroot. "Me?" he asked without inflection.

"Mebbe," the Rio Kid replied flatly. "My job is to watch out for the interest of the railroad and I ain't goin' to worry whose toes I step on."

Tolliver's eyes blazed angrily and he quickly dropped his gaze to the sawdust floor. When he looked up, his yellowish face was as calm as ever.

"That's big talk, Rio Kid," he drawled. "Now I'll have my say. Yuh don't scare me and I got enough boys to side me in any showdown yuh might call. It'll prob'bly be a lot healthier for yuh if yuh get out of Utah."

The Rio Kid's arm shot out and he grabbed the man's white shirt front. Instantly all sound died in the big room and a hundred pair of eyes stared at the two men. The Rio Kid's jaw bunched with working muscles, and his mouth was a flattened line.

"I don't take hoorawin', Tolliver," he challenged. "I reckon yuh got to learn some respect for a law badge. Yuh're goin' to jail right now."

Tolliver choked and the crowd surged forward. The Rio Kid's free hand slid his Colt from the holster and Celestino hovered close, his eyes darting toward the crowd, his hand ready to claw his six from leather.

The Rio Kid jerked Tolliver toward him and rammed the Colt in his stomach.

"Let's go, Tolliver." The man lost his calm. His eyes sparkled and his thin lips writhed back from his big teeth.

"I'll kill yuh for this!" he threatened.

"Later." The Rio Kid grinned without mirth. "Right now yuh're spendin' a night in jail. Get movin', pronto. If any of yore boys try back-shootin', yuh'll get salivated. My thumb's holdin' back the hammer."

Dan Ryan suddenly burst into a roar of laughter.

• • Next Issue's Novel: INDIAN OUTPOST, by TOM CURRY • •

"By Ireland's snakes, ye've called his bluff!"

The Rio Kid jerked his head back toward the entrance and the little group started moving. A lane opened up before them, a lane formed by silent, tense gunmen whose hands itched to snatch sixes from leather. Tolliver marched with his face working, the Rid Kid's gun boring into his back. Celestino followed him, ready for instant action at the first sign of movement in the crowd. Dan Ryan, chuckling still, brought up the rear.

OUTSIDE, the Rio Kid borrowed a page from Ryan's book. He marched Todd Tolliver, feared boss of the Corrine hard cases, down the center of the street. The man's anger had given away to a chill, frozen expression, and his shallow eyes glittered with a deadly hatred.

The Rio Kid walked him to the jail and into one of the cells. He locked the door and came back to the office. Celestino grinned at him.

"The firs' one we stop, no?" he asked.

The Rio Kid shook his head. "Yuh guessed wrong, *amigo*. Todd Tolliver's goin' to take a heap of stoppin'."

Ryan looked uncertain. "Yez can't hold him, me bucko."

The Rio Kid nodded and holstered his Colt. "I know that. Todd's lawyer will jerk him first thing in the mornin', but I've set his hold on the town back on its heels. I reckon he ruled a lot by fear. Yuh can't be scared of a man and laugh at him at the same time."

Ryan's red face was spread in a grin. Then he sobered.

"That's a smart move, Pryor—if yuh live. I reckon any of Todd's gunnies will take a pot shot at yuh now. How about Todd back there? Any visitors?"

The Rio Kid shook his head. "Not until his lawyer gets him out in the mornin' with a court order. I'll have a talk with him later."

He waved his hand at Dan Ryan, listened a moment to Todd Tolliver's steady pacing in the cell, then left the jail. His eyes were hard, quick-moving. Among the many who stared curiously at him were probably several of Tolliver's men. Celestino again dropped back a few paces to cover any attack that might come from the rear.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *First Blood*

WITH long, purposeful strides the Rio Kid walked back to the office of the Union Pacific. General Dodge was a little surprised to see him back so soon and he looked a little worried when the Rio Kid told him of Tolliver's arrest.

"That's exactly what I want," he said thoughtfully when Bob Pryor finished, "but you can't make it stick. This brings things in the open and probably will increase the attacks on the U.P."

"But, General," the Rio Kid argued, "it may bring Tolliver's backer into the open. Tolliver is important to the mysterious hombre behind him, and that hombre will move to get Tolliver out of jail. He'll work mebbe through you, or the judge, or mebbe Dan Ryan. Yuh can spot him then."

Dodge's face lighted. "That's smart thinking, Pryor. It may work. But our mystery man may not disclose his hand."

"I'm takin' the chance," the Rio Kid said, his face grim. "If it don't work, I'll have to smoke the polecat out some other way. I'll be droppin' around later, General."

He left the office, going directly to Mary Fitzhugh's tent hotel. He found her waiting impatiently, eager to start the search for her father. She was dressed for the street and her violet eyes sparkled when the Rio Kid came in.

"We'll see yore uncle now," he told her.

She stood up swiftly and then looked puzzled.

"But where will we find him?"

The Rio Kid kept his face straight. "That'll be easy." He tapped his badge and Mary seemed to notice it for the first time. "Tolliver got a little too careless with the law. He's in jail and we can talk to him without fear of interruption."

Mary's eyes widened and her red lips parted a little in surprise. For a moment the Rio Kid thought she would be angry, but she only turned toward the

door. When she spoke, her voice revealed nothing.

"We'd better be on our way, Captain Pryor."

He walked by her side toward the jail, with Celestino just behind. In front of Tolliver's gambling tent, the Rio Kid took Mary's arm to help her across the street. They waited for a freight wagon to pass, then started toward the opposite curb. Dan Ryan watched them from the door of the jail.

A gun roared from behind them. The Rio Kid came up on his toes, spun half around, knocking Mary to one side. He fell flat in the dust of the street, his knees drawn up.

The girl screamed.

Celestino whirled, his gun blurring out of the holster. The drygulch six barked again and the young Mexican was driven backward by the slug that hit his shoulder. His Colt dropped from his paralyzed fingers.

The crowd parted like a covey of frightened quail. A squint-eyed gunman crouched in the doorway of the tent. His slitted eyes glittered and his thin lips drew back over his teeth in a killing snarl. His gun shifted toward Mary.

The Rio Kid suddenly rolled to one side and his six blasted from the dust of the street. The gunman doubled over as though a giant's fist had mauled him in the stomach. His gun flew out of his hand in a glittering arc. He folded his arms around his waist and his knees buckled. He fell face forward, his boots kicking loudly on the planked sidewalk.

THE Rio Kid's blue eyes were cold and deadly. His other fist was filled with an iron when he walked toward the tent in a deadly crouch, his face hard, his jaw outthrust. Dan Ryan pounded through the dust after him, swearing rich Irish oaths and threatening to tear the gambling tent down with his own hands.

Bob Pryor stepped over the dead gunman and continued his slow walk into the tent. The bar was silent, the crowd pushing back from the Rio Kid's guns and his implacable questioning stare. His eyes centered on a giant of a man with a thick black beard who stood at the bar. There was a cleared space to either side of him.

The Rio Kid slowly holstered his irons and walked toward the man, his muscles tensed for action. His voice was low and filled with suppressed fury.

"I reckon you and me have met before," he said.

The giant's green eyes did not waver. The thick lips beneath the beard curled back in a contemptuous grin.

"Reckon not," he answered.

The Rio Kid shook his head. "Yuh don't remember the lava beds near St. George?"

The giant continued to grin. Dan Ryan came puffing into the tent. He took in the situation with a single sweeping glance. He came into position to guard the Rio Kid's back and his hand was taloned close to his gun. The Rio Kid caught his quick whisper.

"Yez are talkin' to Black Judkins."

Bob Pryor didn't so much as nod. His eyes were hard on Judkins' face.

"Yore gunman took a shot at me and missed," he accused.

Judkins shrugged. "He ain't my gunman and I reckon yuh're lucky. Curly was pretty fast and pretty good."

The Rio Kid's voice still held deadly menace. "He hit my friend and tried to shoot the lady I was with. Somethin' like this happened once before. Savvy?"

"Yuh're loco," the giant said steadily. "I've never seen yuh before."

"Yuh're a liar!" The Rio Kid's voice sounded like the crack of a whip.

Black Judkins' face flamed red and his big hands made an instinctive drop toward his holsters. Instantly the Rio Kid came into a fighting crouch, his fingers spreading out over the twin guns. Judkins caught himself, but he couldn't control his voice.

"I'll pick my own time to call yuh, hombre, and my own way," he said, with deadly menace.

The Rio Kid smiled scornfully. "When yore boss gives yuh the word, yuh mean, yore way will be a shot in the back."

Judkins flinched, then the snarling smile came back to his lips.

"That's as may be. But I'm shore callin' yuh, Rio Kid, and it won't be long."

He deliberately turned his back and ordered a drink in a booming voice. The Rio Kid studied the broad back for a moment and then abruptly turned on his heel and hurried from the tent.

Dan Ryan kept his position, his eyes

circling the gunhawks, until his deputy had cleared the tent. Ryan spat elaborately on the sawdust floor, his gray eyes an insulting challenge. Then he walked out with a rolling swagger. Black Judkins did not move.

Outside, the Rio Kid bent over Celestino. The young Mexican's shoulder was smashed by the slug and he was in need of immediate attention. Ryan helped and he and the Rio Kid carried Celestino a few doors down the street to a doctor's office. Mary, white-faced, waited with the Rio Kid while the doctor worked on Celestino in the inner office.

"I thought you'd been killed," she said, her voice quivery.

The Rio Kid shook his head. "Not touched, but I figgered the next slug would be for you. I had to spot the gunny before he done some real damage."

Mary's face was drawn. "But why are we marked?"

"I'm not shore yet," the Rio Kid said, as his face lengthened, "but it's beginnin' to point to this uncle of yores."

The girl's eyes clouded. "I'd heard some bad tales about uncle back East. My mother was never proud of her brother, but he always seemed nice to me the few times I saw him."

Bob Pryor took her hand in a quick, unconscious gesture.

"I reckon we can't always read people right," he assured. "From all I hear, yore Uncle Todd has been mixed up in a lot of shady deals."

BOTH looked up when the doctor opened the door. He was young and serious, with black hair that waved back from a broad, high forehead. A thin black mustache lined his long upper lip and he had a quick way of smiling that was almost boyish. He seemed to notice Mary Fitzhugh for the first time, but he spoke to the Rio Kid.

"Your friend has a broken bone in the arm just below the shoulder. It'll be in a sling for a long time, but it isn't too serious. I ordered him to rest here for the remainder of the day. He'll be up and around tomorrow."

The Rio Kid felt his breath sigh out in gusty relief. He had worried about Celestino. He stood up, jamming his hat on his head.

"That's good news, Dr.—"

The sawbones pulled his eyes away from Mary.

"Dr. Truman," he supplied. "I'm new to Corinne. In fact, your friend is my first patient."

"He's a tough one to practise on," the Rio Kid said, with a laugh. "I reckon yuh'll have a lot of gunshot business from what I hear." He turned to Mary. "We'd best be goin'."

She arose and left with him reluctantly. The Rio Kid caught her watching the young doctor out of the corner of her eyes. He grinned but said nothing until they reached the street.

"Celestino's a funny hombre," he said softly then. "When he gets a broken arm, he likes to have visitors. Think yuh could arrange it?"

She started and flushed and gave him a searching look. But the Rio Kid's lean face was bland, his blue eyes looked ahead. A smile hovered at the corner of Mary's lips.

"I'll see him this afternoon," she promised.

"He likes lots of company," the Rio Kid insisted. "Make it tonight, too."

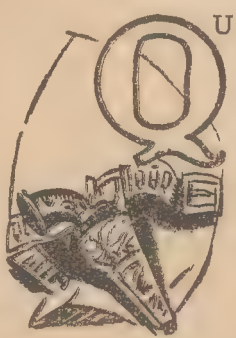
Before the girl could reply, they turned into the jail. Dan Ryan was waiting for them, his Irish face smiling and his gray eyes lighting at the sight of the girl.

"Yuh called another bluff, Kid," he greeted. "I liked the way yuh pegged Black Judkins."

"He told us nothin', though," the Rio Kid reminded him and asked for the cell keys.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Cold Trail*



QUICKLY alert, Todd Tolliver looked up from the bunk when he heard the key in the lock. His long face grew darker when he saw Mary Fitzhugh, and his bloodless lips pressed so that harsh wrinkles showed at the corner of his mouth. The Rio Kid opened the grille and he and Mary stepped through.

## GENERAL GRENVILLE M. DODGE

GENERAL DODGE was born in Danvers, Massachusetts, on April 12, 1831. Though of excellent stock, his parents were not too stable financially, but they did manage to send young Dodge to Norwich College where he became a cadet and a student of engineering.

Graduating, he went to Chicago to seek his fortune and there he became affiliated with the Rock Island Railroad. Though young, he made a name for himself and came under the personal attention and guidance of the railroad's chief engineer. He soon became recognized as an authority on railroad construction.

When the Civil War broke out Dodge was commissioned a colonel of an Iowa regiment, his home at that time. He served first in Missouri, taking part in the battle of Pea Ridge that broke the power of the Confederacy west of the Mississippi. Transferred to Tennessee, he made his mark by quick construction of rail lines to be used by the Union armies. It was said that he could repair rail as fast as the Confederates could tear them up.

Under Grant, he organized an excellent spy system that collected definite information of inestimable value in planning Grant's campaigns.

After the war, Dodge was appointed chief engineer in charge of the construction of the Union Pacific. He had been cited by President Lincoln as the man who "knew more about railroad building than any one else in the country." He was a personal friend of General Sherman, and of Grant, later president of the United States, who came to Dodge in time of financial trouble.

General Dodge died January 3, 1916.

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The Rio Kid stood so that the light from the barred window fell on Tolliver's face.

"Yore niece wants a talk with yuh, Tolliver," he said briefly.

The lanky man shook his head. "I don't want to talk to her."

Mary put her hand on his arm. "But, Uncle Todd, I've got to find out about Father! You must know what has happened to him."

He threw off her hand with a surly shrug of his thin body. His voice was filled with venom.

"I know nothin' about the major. He just left things in my charge and traipsed off to California. That's the last I heard."

"But didn't he say anything about me?" the girl asked in a hurt voice. "Didn't he leave some message?"

Tolliver glared at her, then shot a glance filled with hatred at the Rio Kid.

"He left yore money in my care. I was to see yuh got an allowance, and I was to use my own judgment about it. I reckon yuh're keeping poor company, Mary, with this ramblin' son."

"But Captain Pryor has been a friend!" Mary protested. "He was Father's friend!"

Tolliver sniffed. "I hate the sight of him. Mary, I reckon yuh ain't worthy to receive yore poor father's money. This Rio Kid is a notorious character—"

Her hand caught him a ringing slap across his sunken cheek. He gasped and fell back in the bunk, his fingers touching the red mark, his shallow eyes stunned.

"Yuh dared strike me!" he mumbled. "Yore own uncle!"

The Rio Kid stepped forward and took Mary's arm.

"I reckon Dan Ryan had best take yuh back to the hotel, Mary. Me'n Uncle Todd'll have a long talk. I'll cut yore trail later."

He opened the door and let her through, whistling for Ryan. In a moment, the girl and the marshal left the jail and the Rio Kid slowly turned to stare down at the lanky man on the bunk. Todd Tolliver's shifting eyes refused to meet Pryor's as the Rio Kid stood over him.

"Get this, Tolliver," the Kid said grimly. "Major Fitzhugh was my commander and my friend, in the Army. I'd shore make it a point to do some salivatin' if I find out he's been killed."

Tolliver glanced up, then down to the floor again.

"I ain't interested in yore friends," he growled.

"Where's Major Fitzhugh?" the Rio Kid asked softly.

"I don't know, I told yuh. He left for California. I ain't heard from him since."

"Yuh got all his property here in Corinne?"

"That's none of yore business," Tolliver spat.

The Rio Kid's chuckle held no humor. "Now that's where yuh read sign wrong, Tolliver. It is my business. I aim to see his daughter gets a square deal. If she's got any money or property comin' to her, she's goin' to get it."

Tolliver shrugged. "Yuh can't do nothing. The major told me to handle his things and that's what I'm doin'. Mebbe he's dead, but nobody knows. A man's got to be disappeared seven years before the courts'll call him legally dead."

The Rio Kid nodded. "I know that."

Tolliver grinned. "So I handle his *dinero* and his share of the business for seven years. Ain't nobody can stop me and if I think that niece of mine don't deserve an allowance, I can cut her off."

THE Rio Kid looked down at the sallow face that leered up at him.

"Yuh're smart, Tolliver," he drawled. "I make a bet there ain't a cent of the major's left when the seven years are up and Mary makes a claim."

Tolliver laughed, a harsh grating sound. "Now I wouldn't bet with yuh, Rio Kid."

Bob Pryor turned away quickly, holding in his anger. He unlocked the door and stepped out into the corridor. Tolliver watched him with a triumphant grin as he turned the key in the lock.

The Rio Kid gripped the bars and stared into the cell. His voice was low.

"It's a cold trail, Tolliver, but I aim to find out what happened to Major Fitzhugh. I got an idea. I think there's proof if I can find it. I wouldn't like to be in yore boots if I do find it."

The Rio Kid whirled, his hand dropping to his holster. Black Judkins stood in the doorway, a cocked six in his hand lined on the Rio Kid's stomach. Bob Pryor's hand froze just above his own Colt.

Black Judkins laughed again. "Now that's right sensible. I told yuh I'd pick my own time and place to settle our argument—my own way, too. This is it, Rio Kid, yore ticket to Boot Hill."

His finger whitened on the trigger.

The Rio Kid was caught. He knew he would have no chance to pull his six before Judkins' slugs would tear the life from him. He felt a sudden anger that he had let himself be trapped so neatly. His muscles tensed and his blue eyes bored into Judkins' brutal face. There was not a sign of fear in his gaze.

Todd Tolliver sprang from the bunk and ran to the bars.

"Black!" his sharp voice cut through the deadly silence. "Hold yore six! Shuck his hardware and get the keys."

Black Judkins scowled and shook his head. "I'm goin' to blast his middle wide open."

"Black, yuh heard me!" Tolliver's voice crackled. "Get the keys first, and his gun."

Judkins' green eyes wavered, jumped to Tolliver's eager face and back again to the Rio Kid. He scowled angrily, opened his mouth to protest, and then silently gave in to Tolliver.

"Back up against them bars," he ordered the Rio Kid.

Tolliver's skinny fingers reached out and shucked the guns from the Rio Kid's twin holsters. He stretched a little further through the bars and snatched the big key ring. With his own gun boring into his back, Bob Pryor could only stand helplessly while Tolliver pitched the keys to Black Judkins' feet.

The burly *segundo* holstered his six and picked up the ring. He swaggered to the door and unlocked it. The Rio Kid stood stone-still while Tolliver edged through into the hallway. The tall, lean man stood in front of him, grinning, both his fists filled with the Rio Kid's sixes.

He made a motion toward the cell with one of the guns.

"Yuh get a taste of yore own medicine, Pryor. In there—pronto."

The Rio Kid considered a play for one of his hide-out guns and thought better of it. If Tolliver were killed in a gunsmoke showdown, no one would know the man behind him. The Rio Kid edged around the door and into the cell.

Tolliver slammed the door closed and the heavy key grated on steel as he turned it. He stood there smiling triumphantly at the Rio Kid.

"I reckon I might send some of the boys around to see yuh, Pryor," he exulted. "It would sort of even up for marchin' me through the streets."

The Rio Kid sank onto the bunk and shrugged.

"Mark yore own tally, Tolliver."

JUDKINS grabbed Tolliver's skinny arm.

"Don't I get to salivate him?" he demanded.

"Now what would be the use of that right now?" Tolliver drawled, grinning. "Shootin' a lawman would only get us in bad. Right now, we're just turnin' the tables on a proddy gent who arrested me illegal. I don't think the Rio Kid will do much about it!"

Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, didn't answer. He swung his feet up in the bunk and stretched out. Judkins growled an oath under his breath and swung after Todd Tolliver. After a few seconds the Rio Kid heard the front door close. He remained stretched out, grinning a little at the barred windows.

He gave Tolliver credit for a lot of things, none of them good. Right now, for instance, the deputy marshal was locked up in his own jail and he wouldn't be released until Dan Ryan came back. But four years of Civil War had taught the Rio Kid patience above everything else, so he settled more comfortably in the bunk to wait.

Time passed slowly and the Rio Kid dozed lightly on the cell bunk. Dan Ryan would be making his rounds and might not come back for two hours or more. Celestino would be resting and probably Mary Fritzhugh would be talking to Doc Truman, the young sawbones.

Abruptly, the Rio Kid's eyes snapped open. He had heard nothing, but he felt that someone stood silently in the corridor looking at him through the bars. He controlled an impulse to jump up. Instead, he strained his ears to listen.

"Wagh!" a dry voice cut the silence. "Ye be wilderness trained, younker."

The Rio Kid sat up and swung his feet out of the bunk. A man was watching him from beyond the bars, an old man whose face was a mass of sun-burned wrinkles. He carried a long rifle of a type long since obsolete, but looked as if he could use it.

His thin face was stubbled with beard and the skin hung loosely from his chin to his scrawny neck. His thin lips were twisted up to one side and his jaw muscles worked slowly on a quid of tobacco. His faded eyes were still keen, wrinkled deeply at the corners.

"Ain't many but the mountain men as would freeze when they sensed Injuns or rascals a-lurkin' behind 'em," he said. "Whar's the dep'ty marshal?"

The Rio Kid grinned. "I'm him—Bob Pryor."

The old man didn't look surprised. He watched the Rio Kid a minute and spoke calmly.

"It's a tarnation strange place for a lawman to be. Yore float stick got tangled. I'm Jim Bridger. The gin'ral sent me ever."

The Rio Kid looked at the famous scout with new interest. Jim Bridger appeared to be as old as the Rockies

where he had lived most of his life, but the Rio Kid judged him to be around sixty-five. His buckskin coat with the fringed sleeves hung loosely around his gaunt frame. He wore a black shirt, the collar open, and the tight belt around his waist carried a heavy skinning knife.

The old man shifted the rifle. "Reckon ye'll be in thar some time?" he asked.

The Rio Kid laughed. "Until Dan Ryan comes back. I got treed."

"I've heard a good deal about ye, Pryor," Bridger said, after a moment's silence. "Reckon some of 'em's been windies like I tell 'bout the glass mountain and the petrified forest. But it still makes big talk."

The Rio Kid came to the bars.

"I've heard a heap about you, Bridger," he declared. "What's General Dodge want us to do?"

"Ain't no use talkin' until ye're out of there," Bridger grunted. "I'll fetch Dan Ryan should I cut his sign."

Without another word he turned and walked soundlessly away on fringed and beaded moccasins. The Rio Kid listened, but he never heard the door open. Jim Bridger moved with all the noise of a shadow.

The Rio Kid stood at the bars for a short while, then returned to his cot.

## CHAPTER X

### *Jim Bridger Takes a Hand*

IN A moment Dan Ryan came bustling into the corridor. Jim Bridger was a silent ghost behind him. The marshal cursed steadily as he opened the door and the Rio Kid stepped out.

"Shore and it's me that'll blast that black-hearted imp wide open!" Ryan promised.

"Leave Tolliver alone," the Rio Kid advised. "He was bound to be released tomorrer anyway. I want him to think I've come off second best and know it. If I'm right, Tolliver will be laughin' at me—and leavin' hisself wide open."

Jim Bridger leaned against the wall. "Wagh!" he grunted. "Too much talk. Ye'd best mark my trail to the gin'ral's." He turned and glided up the corridor. The Rio Kid stepped into Ryan's office and filled his holsters from the marshal's big arsenal. He stepped out into the street to see Bridger's lean form gliding smoothly through the crowd.

It was later afternoon and the sun was low in the west when the Rio Kid sat in a chair before General Dodge's desk. Jim Bridger stood silently by the window to one side of the room. A Corinne business man, Claude Mantin, talked eagerly to General Dodge.

"I can organize a band of Vigilantes," Mantin was saying. "They'll stop this looting and fighting, this thieving and gambling."

Dodge shook his head decisively. "I won't tolerate the Vigilantes, Mantin, though I understand how you feel about it."

Mantin sank back, frowning a little. He was as tall as the Rio Kid and of the same lithe build. But his skin was fairer, and splotched with big freckles. His hair was a sandy red and his brows were light. He wore a well-cut frock coat that made his big shoulders look square and firm. He drummed impatiently on the desk top with blunt, strong fingers. When he caught the Rio Kid's searching glance he shrugged, accepting Dodge's veto with good grace.

"Bridger," Dodge was saying, his hands folded. "I called you in to help with this trouble. I think you and Captain Pryor can work together."

Bridger nodded silently and the Rio Kid felt a surge of pride that he quickly pushed down. To be accepted by this greatest of the scouts and old mountain man was an honor that didn't come to every man.

Dodge turned to a wall map of Utah.

"I want both of you men to scout west of here, beyond the Central Pacific's end of track," he said. "Before we start a round up in Corinne. I want to make sure no renegade band from outside has been plundering my work camps. I hear there are squatters out there. Find out who they are and if they've filed land claims or purchased sections from some speculator. That may give us a line on our mysterious enemy."

Mantin leaned forward. "That's a good idea, General. I'll furnish their supplies myself." He caught the Rio Kid's look of surprise. "Captain Pryor,

everything I can do to help the Union Pacific is going to help me. That railroad will mean an immense amount of new business."

The Rio Kid nodded and glanced at Bridger. The old mountain man chewed placidly.

"I reckon our stick floats west, younker," he observed. "Ain't nothin' like gettin' started."

He pushed away from the wall and the Rio Kid stood up. Mantin picked up his tall hat and arose. He shook hands with Dodge and followed the Rio Kid and Bridger out of the office.

DOWN on the street, Mantin led the way to the big, sprawling frame building that was his store. It was by far the largest of its kind the Rio Kid had seen outside Salt Lake City and he was impressed. Mantin was pleased by Bob Pryor's comment.

"It is just one of my interests, Captain," he said. "I have a lake boat and I dabble a little in real estate. I have a firm belief in the future of Utah."

Jim Bridger shifted restlessly. "Wagh! Heap talk, little do. I'm plumb achin' to get where they ain't a whole passel o' people usin' up the fresh air."

Mantin laughed and, under Jim Bridger's laconic directions, assembled the supplies for a long *pasear* into the country north and west of the Great Salt Lake. It was dark night by the time the job was done and Mantin wearily gave orders to close up the store.

"I'll have some of the boys tote this stuff to the livery stable where you keep yore horses," he told the Rio Kid. "It'll be there bright and early so you can make the packs and lose little time getting started."

The Rio Kid agreed and thanked him. Jim Bridger walked with Pryor as far as the doctor's office.

"Younker," he said, "I'll be around just 'fore daylight."

"Where yuh stayin'?" the Rio Kid asked.

The old man stared hard at him. "Whar ye think? Plumb out of this town where I ain't shoved around. I declare, it's a pity the way people keep traipsin' into the West. Plumb sp'ilin' it, they are."

He cuddled his rifle in his arm and strode silently off, seemingly just melting into the night and the crowd. The Rio Kid watched him stride away, a smile on his wide, firm lips. There were not many of old Jim Bridger's breed left now, the men who had first pushed into the unmapped wilderness west of the Mississippi in search of fur. They had been the forerunners of all who had made the West—the explorers, the mappers, the Indian fighters who had blazed the Western trail.

The Rio Kid sighed and turned into the doctor's office. Young Doc Truman looked up when the Rio Kid stepped into the room.

"Your friend is getting along splendidly," he assured. "But I'm having a hard time to keep him in bed."

The Rio Kid grinned and opened the door Doc Truman had indicated. A lamp burned low beside the bed and Celestino stirred restlessly. His dark eyes lighted when he saw the Rio Kid.

"General, eet is not that I should lay around like the fat *duenna,* no? Tell heem, these doctaire, he ees loco. Celestino Mireles theenk the broken arm she's *'sta nada.* I ride, no?"

The Rio Kid laughed, but shook his head.

"Yuh stay right here until me and Jim Bridger get back. We're takin' a little *pasear* west and north to learn what we can."

"But, General, iss bad Celestino he not go!" the Mexican protested, his face tragic.

The Rio Rid gently pushed him back when he tried to sit up.

"Yuh can move around tomorrow, *amigo.* I want yuh to watch after Mary. Tolliver may think up some skulduggery when I'm gone."

"In that case," Doc Truman said from the doorway, "I'll help Celestino watch after her."

The Rio Kid turned. Doc Truman's eyes glittered angrily and his fists were clenched. The Rio Kid nodded, pleased.

"It'll be a help, Doc. Tolliver shore didn't want her here, and he ain't goin' to run the risk of her nosin' around. I reckon he'll try to shut her up. It's been tried twice before."

"I'm pretty fair with a six myself, Pryor," Doc Truman said, and his jaw was set.

Bob Pryor turned back to Celestino.

"Yuh got a real job cut out for yuh, *amigo*. Tolliver will strike like a snake and it's up to you to see he don't succeed. I'll be seein' yuh within a week."

Celestino nodded sorrowfully. "*Vaya con Dios*, my General. I shall watch the senorita."

The Rio Kid left the room, Doc Truman following him. At the door the young doctor cleared his throat and looked embarrassed.

"Captain Pryor," he asked hesitantly, "does Mary Fitzhugh mean anything to you? I mean—"

The Rio Kid shot him a quick look, then grinned.

"Don't worry about that. Her father was a good friend of mine and I shore want to know what happened to him. I'm helpin' Mary locate him—and no more. Is that what yuh want to know?"

Doc Truman looked relieved. He smiled and pushed out his hand.

"I'd like cards in the game," he said firmly. "I think Mary's the finest girl I ever met."

"Yuh got the cards and I make the same tally for Mary," the Rio Kid said, as he took the hand. "I shore wish yuh luck with the girl."

He jammed his hat on his head and stepped out into the street. He chuckled as he walked along, back to his hotel. Passing Tolliver's gambling tent he noticed the crowd that surged in and out of the wide doors. From the looks of things, Mary's greedy uncle was coining money.

The Rio Kid's lean face tightened.

"I wonder how much yuh stole from Major Fitzhugh, Todd Tolliver," he muttered. "I reckon a showdown on that ain't far off."

In his room at the hotel, the Rio Kid missed Celestino. The small room seemed empty without the young Mexican's lithe form stretched out lazily on the bed.

The Rio Kid slowly undressed, his mind busy with the problem that faced General Dodge. He had a moment's regret that Todd Tolliver had escaped from jail so easily, but he quickly dismissed that thought. The fact that the gun boss of Corinne had been publicly escorted through the streets to the jail had gone far to shatter Tolliver's prestige.

The Rio Kid blew out the lamp and lay down. He stared up at the ceiling, thinking about Mary Fitzhugh. Tolliver had threatened to leave her penniless by cutting off her allowance. In the darkness, the Rio Kid's eyes narrowed. Tolliver had spoken as though he knew he would always be in charge of Major Fitzhugh's estate. If that were true, then Fitzhugh was dead, probably on Tolliver's orders to Black Judkins or some other killer.

The Rio Kid's thoughts grew black when he thought of the many attempts that had been made on his own life, and on that of the girl. Tolliver's gang must be large, for he apparently had gunmen in plenty he could sacrifice to down the Rio Kid.

As he became drowsy, he thought of young Dr. Truman's interest in Mary Fitzhugh. He smiled. Mary would go far to find as good a man. The Rio Kid's judgments were quick and sure, developed through years of swift-striking danger.

The Rio Kid hoped Mary and Doc Truman would some day get hitched. She was a good girl. She deserved the best. The Rio Kid dropped off to sleep, dead tired. . . .

THERE was no way of knowing what time it was when his eyes abruptly snapped open. Some sixth sense had penetrated his sleep-drugged brain. His window was dark and he could see the distant stars in the velvet-black sky. He lay still for a time, his eyes gradually bring the dark objects of the room into focus. There was no sound, nothing, and yet he had that sense of close-pressing danger.

The door creaked a little, a small noise that was hardly distinguishable. Instantly the Rio Kid stiffened. Someone was slowly opening the door, trying to prevent any sound at all. The Rio Kid slowly moved his body so that the bed would not make a noise. His feet touched the floor and he eased himself erect. His eyes fastened on the door. It was slowly swinging inward an inch at a time.

He pulled his Colt carefully from the holster, took a single stride to one side that would put him outside the pale, dim light that came in the window. He waited, as silent as a cat.

The door continued to inch open and

at last the Rio Kid could sense a shadowy figure standing in the opening. The man peered toward the bed and seemed to listen. The Rio Kid froze, the gun firm in his fist.

The prowler seemed satisfied. The door swung a little wider and the man stepped inside. The Rio Kid barely distinguished a squat figure topped by a big hat that threw the face in dark shadows.

The man just as carefully closed the door behind him. It was probably a matter of seconds, but it seemed an eternity to the Rio Kid.

## CHAPTER XI

### *Battle in the Dark*

AT LAST the man came slowly forward toward the bed. There was no moon and the dim light from the window was not enough to clearly etch the features. Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, waited silently, his eyes hard and cold.

The man's hand dropped to his waist and he pulled a six from his gun-belt. It leveled down on the bed.

"Freeze, *amigo!*" the Rio Kid said softly. "Yuh ain't doin' murder tonight."

The man stiffened and stood still. Slowly his head twisted around and he choked when the Rio Kid stepped from the shadows. Bob Pryor took the gun from the man's hand, pitched it in a far corner. In the still of the night it made a loud clatter.

"Walk over to the table," the Rio Kid ordered. "There's matches. Light the lamp."

The man moved carefully as though afraid he might startle the Rio Kid into firing the gun he held. The intruder's fingers made a nervous scratching sound as he fumbled for the matches. He struck one, lighted the lamp. He dropped his hands and watched the Rio Kid.

Bob Pryor looked him over. His features were dark and coarse, the eyes black and piglike. Greasy black hair hung in straight strings from under his battered hat. His rotund paunch was poorly covered by a soiled and gaping shirt. The Rio Kid tabbed him as a breed, a crossing of Indian and lower-class Mexican.

The man eyed the gun and looked up. "So what you do now, senor?"

The Rio Kid kept the gun steady. "I reckon yuh ought to know that. Any reason why I shouldn't shoot yuh?"

The man swallowed noisily, then the defiant look came back to his narrow eyes.

"Any time yuh want to gamble in that, *amigo,* go right to it," the Rio Kid said, and chuckled mirthlessly. "Yuh're one of Todd Tolliver's little buttons, ain't yuh?"

The man shrugged. "I know nothing."

"Or mebbe I should have said Black Judkins."

"It is that I know nothing, senor," the man repeated, with an evil grin.

The Rio Kid pulled a chair forward with his foot, never taking his eyes from the intruder. He sank down into the chair, his six held steady on the man's big paunch.

"What's yore name?" he demanded.

"Juan Onante."

"Why did yuh come in here?"

Juan shrugged his fat shoulders again. "*Quien sabe,* senor? Could be the *pesos,* no?"

The Rio Kid shook his head. "No, not *pesos.* Were you going to kill me?"

Juan Onante thought the idea over for a moment, then flashed an impudent grin.

"Do I look like one who kills, senor?"

The Rio Kid nodded. "You do."

"Then maybe it iss so why I came," Juan answered.

He shifted his weight and the Rio Kid noticed the flow of muscles in his shoulders. For all his fat, Juan was powerful.

"Juan, who sent yuh?" The Rio Kid's voice sounded angry.

"Senor"—Juan laughed, a throaty chuckle—"I do not tell you thees thing. You beat me, I still do not tell heem."

The Rio Kid's blue eyes flared as he stared at the man. His long jaw set and he shifted the six.

"Juan, yuh got a lesson comin'. I'm goin' to give it to yuh."

The Rio Kid arose and slowly backed to the chair by the bed where his gun-belt hung. He slipped the Colt into

the holster, his eyes hard on Juan Onante. He came to the center of the room with a purposeful stride.

Juan's pig eyes followed him. The Mexican's face lighted and he brought up his powerful arms and big fists.

"Senor," he said, "eet is bad theeng you do. You get hurt."

The Rio Kid shook his head. "We'll see about that. I aim to beat some answers out of yore hide."

The breed stepped back from the table, his eyes wary. His big arms dangled at his side and he forced the Rio Kid to circle the table and come after him. Abruptly Juan surged forward.

His arms reached out to grab the Rio Kid and hug him in a death grip to the powerful chest. With the smooth speed of light, the Rio Kid stepped to one side. His fist crashed off Juan's head as the man rushed past him.

The breed stumbled and caught himself against the far wall. He shook his head to clear the stinging pain of the Rio Kid's blow. His teeth flashed in his dark face.

"That one, she's good," he acknowledged.

Now Juan came toward Bob Pryor, more cautiously this time, his slit eyes alert and gleaming. The Rio Kid stepped in, his fists slashing a hard one-two towards the greasy face. Juan took both of the blows, one in the mouth, and the second scraped along his jaw.

The breed's powerful arm snaked in and his thick fingers clutched the Rio Kid's wrist. He jerked and the Rio Kid slammed toward him. Smoothly Juan crouched and Pryor's flying body catapulted off his hip and crashed onto the bed. Juan jumped, fast as a cat for all his weight.

The Rio Kid doubled up and his feet lashed out. He caught the charging breed square in the chest and Pryor's muscles knotted as he kicked out. Juan was sent sprawling backward, his arms flailing wildly to catch his balance. He struck the table and crashed it over. The lamp was snuffed out instantly, plunging the room into blackness.

The Rio Kid rolled off the bed in time to meet Juan's charge. He avoided the clutching hands and sank his fist up to the wrist in the fat around Juan's stomach. Juan grunted and faded backward. The Rio Kid bored in, his fists smashing through the man's guard. He felt bone cartilage break under his knuckles and again he smashed into the man's mouth.

Juan broke back, circling the room, vainly trying to get set to rush the Rio Kid. But Bob Pryor would not let him. The fists continued their terrific pounding and at last Juan went down, moaning, by the door.

The Rio Kid stood over him a moment, his chest rising and falling with the deep breaths he pulled into his laboring lungs. Juan remained on the floor and the Rio Kid turned toward the bed, carefully circling the table so that his bare feet would not pick up glass from the broken lamp chimney.

He slipped into shirt and trousers and pulled on his boots. Juan had stopped his moaning and lay silently on the floor. Then he moved so fast and so suddenly the Rio Kid was caught off guard. With a single heaving motion, Juan came to his feet and jerked open the door. He was out into the hall and pounding away before the Rio Kid could grab for his six.

BOB PRYOR snaked the gun from the holster and jumped to the window. His eyes probed toward the street, still lighted in broad bands from the windows and doors of saloons and gambling halls going full blast. In a moment Juan sped out of the hotel, his stubby legs propelling him forward at amazing speed.

"Halt!" the Rio Kid yelled. "I'll fire."

Juan kept going, heading for the haven of deep shadow between two saloons on the other side of the street. The Rio Kid raised his gun and it bucked the instant it leveled. Juan howled and stumbled to the dust. The Rio Kid turned from the window and ran into the hall.

The breed wouldn't be moving with a bullet in his leg, the Rio Kid thought grimly. He reached the street and halted. Though the saloons were still going, there were not many people on the street at this time of night. No one had been near the breed when the Rio Kid had brought him down. But he was nowhere in sight.

Bob Pryor snaked his six free of leather, his eyes probing toward the shadows across the street. Juan might have made their shelter. But when the

Rio Kid crossed the street Juan was not lurking in the dark. He had completely disappeared.

Puzzled, the Rio Kid turned back. He found a dark bloodstain in the dust where the breed had lain when the bullet had found him. There was a broad sign to show that Juan had either pulled himself or had been dragged a few yards. The trail ended there, several feet from the nearest shelter.

Dan Ryan came down the street from the jail. He stopped when he saw the Rio Kid.

"What happened?"

The Rio Kid shook his head and turned a puzzled face to the lawman.

"Dan," he asked, "has Corinne town got a magician along with its gunmen and card sharks?"

"Whist," Dan Ryan snorted. "And would yez be poking fun at the marshal?"

The Rio Kid shook his head. "No. But someone's shore pokin' fun at me—the deadly kind."

An hour later the Rio Kid returned to bed. Dan Ryan had not recognized the name of Juan Onante and was certain the man was not on Tolliver's list of killers and renegades. The Rio Kid had felt that he was.

Ryan had stopped the Rio Kid as he climbed the steps of the hotel porch.

"I'm tellin' yez," he had insisted, "that Todd Tolliver, for all his black heart, has no breeds or Injuns on his pay-roll. Yez can count Todd out on that score, Kid."

"All right, Dan," the Rio Kid had surrendered, "if you want it that way. It gives yuh another problem though."

"What would that be?" Ryan demanded.

"If Todd or Judkins wasn't behind fat Juan, then somebody else was. There's another gang wants me out of the way for some reason. I'm ridin' out with Bridger in the mornin', so yuh can have all week to get the answer to that one."

He left Dan Ryan standing in the street, staring after him, his honest Irish face showing the questions that buzzed in his mind.

The Rio Kid didn't undress, but threw

[*Turn page*]

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himself across the bed. It was only an hour until dawn and old Bridger should be around shortly. The Rio Kid had left his key at the desk for Bridger. . . .

A LIGHT touch on his shoulder awakened Bob Pryor. He opened his eyes to stare up into Bridger's wrinkled face. The old man's thin lips parted in a smile.

"Ye'd been a good trapper, younker," he rumbled. "Ye sleep sound and wake without fuss. In the old days—" He broke off and growled. "Wagh! They're gone for good! Ready to go?"

The Rio Kid nodded and pulled himself off the bed.

He and Bridger reached the street just as the first morning breeze stirred the dust of the churned street. Here and there a lamp glowed feebly against the in-seeping dawn and a bleary-eyed swamper carried out the brass spittoons. Bridger walked with a long springy stride, as silent as the breeze itself.

They roused the hostler at the livery stable and sorted the supplies into two packs for the extra horses they planned to take with them. Saber whinnied eager greetings to the Rio Kid and he stroked the horse's muzzle. The animal seemed to sense that action was afoot.

He returned to the packs and worked beside Bridger, going about the job with efficiency and speed. It didn't take long to load the horses. The Rio Kid stepped back after the last knot was tied. Bridger chewed slowly and touched the Rio Kid's pack.

"Ye got sense," he declared. "Pack is balanced and won't slip. I don't take much to Army style, but I reckon that's yore trainin'. Our stick floats west, younker."

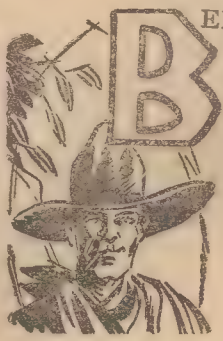
He swung into the leather and placed his long rifle across the saddle in front of him. He touched the animal lightly and started down the street. The Rio Kid mounted Saber, let him buck his eagerness out for a minute, then headed him after Bridger, leading the pack-horse.

The old man rode at an easy slouch and his keen old eyes probed up at the eastern sky.

"We'll light a breakfast fire along the trail somewheres," he told the Rio Kid. "I cain't chew right with a passel of people a-watching me."

## CHAPTER XII

### *Todd Strikes Back*



BEFORE long Bridger and the Rio Kid were out of Corinne, cutting south and west toward the head of the Great Salt Lake. Bridger had nothing to say and the Rio Kid respected his silence. They were coming to the salt marshes and swamps that headed the northern tip of the lake.

Jim Bridger reined in his horse and silently dismounted. He turned to the pack-horse.

"I reckon we could vittle," he said.

The meal was simple but good, and the Rio Kid enjoyed it. Bridger finished first and he stretched his legs out, leaning on one elbow. His faded eyes looked toward the east, toward the high mountains that lay as a barrier between Utah, and Wyoming.

"I rec'lect all this country around here in the old days," he mused. "It was pretty wild." He turned his head and looked south toward the lake. "It was me as discovered the lake. I was a wild younker then and came down the Bear in a bullboat on a bet. That time we figgered she was an arm of the old Pacific."

The Rio Kid smiled. "Yuh was way off the trail."

Bridger sighed. "I know it. Jedediah Smith proved us wrong. Him and his boys was the first to cross the desert west of here to the Mexy land in California. Jed was a good boy, read his Bible and could fight like the devil. Them Mojave Injuns finally got his ha'r down in Arizony. Young he was—just thirty-three."

"You mountain men shore opened up the West for the rest of us," the Rio Kid declared.

Bridger snorted and came to his feet. "Wish to Tophet we hadn't. A whole passel of folks come in hyar and spoiled it all. We'd best break camp, I reckon."

They cut a little farther west until they hit the tip of the lake and followed it north. At the edge of the swampland they came on a crude cabin and a gun-hung man who eyed them suspiciously

as they came up. The Rio Kid waved his hand in greeting and the man grunted something.

"New place," the Rio Kid observed to the man. "Been here long?"

The man stood up, his harsh face distrustful. "Long enough. Any argument?"

"None whatever." The Rio Kid shook his head. "Aim to farm?"

The man grinned. "It's a mite wet for that, pilgrim. I aim to catch me seagulls and train 'em to sing."

Bridger spat a stream of tobacco juice. "Shucks," he said mournfully. "There went my liar champeenship! Ye own this place, younker?"

The man shrugged. "That's my business, I reckon. I'm gettin' mighty tired of jawin' around here."

"This land wouldn't be claimed on by Todd Tolliver, would it?" the Rio Kid asked, as he neck-reined Saber around.

The squatter frowned darkly. "Yuh ask too many questions, pilgrim. It might collect yuh a heap of lead in these parts."

The Rio Kid didn't answer but rode away, with Jim Bridger's mount plodding close behind his own. They were headed due north now and soon left the lake behind them. The Rio Kid pulled to one side and let Jim Bridger come up beside him. Pryor jerked his thumb back toward the cabin they had just left.

"I think General Dodge had the right idea. I'll bet good money against Confederate that feller is one of Tolliver's gunhawks and that section is filed in Tolliver's name."

Bridger nodded. "The trail lines out that way."

"Jim," the Rio Kid said, as he stared thoughtfully ahead. "The man behind Tolliver is smart. Take that feller back there. He's filed on the land and built a cabin. Somebody has messed the land records deliberately, I'll bet, and the railroad'll have to pay our friend back there a goodly sum to get a clear deed to that section. There'd be *dinero* in that scheme."

BRIDGER spat out his cud and fished for some more.

"There would be," he agreed. "But there's always dirty work when a passel of people traipse into a country. I reckon after this job's done, I'll be findin' me a place where they ain't no human but me."

He closed his thin lips tightly around the tobacco and said nothing more for mile on mile.

Several times the two riders found tents and shacks, or even sturdily-built cabins, on what they knew would be land granted to the railroad as subsidy. Most of the men they found were of the same gunhawk breed as the man back by the lake, but one round-faced cheerful little hombre claimed to have bought his section.

"The agent told me the U. P. aimed to irrigate up this way," he chuckled. "Next summer," he said. "The land's cheap and I got enough money to hold out till then. I aim to raise me a whole heap of things."

The Rio Kid leaned down from the saddle. "Who was the agent?" he asked.

The little man scratched his head. "He was a right smooth-talkin' gent. Tall and thin. Name of—of—"

"Tolliver?" the Rio Kid asked grimly. "Todd Tolliver?"

"Yeah, that's him. A right nice man."

The Rio Kid nodded and wheeled Saber around.

"So I've heard," he said sourly.

During the next few days the Rio Kid and Jim Bridger rode west to Promontory Point. The rails were already beyond Promontory and those of the Central Pacific were not far to the west. The lines of the two companies were to meet according to the terms of the government licenses, but the land subsidies involved had nullified this agreement.

The board of directors of both railroads had ordered building to continue. Since the surveys of the railroads could keep three hundred miles ahead of finished track, the work continued. The government was forced to give sections of land for completed track and there was no way in which it could stop the railroads from building. General Dodge was trying desperately to get a junction point satisfactory to both railroads and the government.

Wherever the Rio Kid and Bridger rode, they found the little shacks. Several times they learned that Todd Tolliver had filed on the sections or had simply taken them over. More often, surly gun-belted men refused to answer and the two scouts had to ride on with noth-

ing more definite than suspicion.

One night, in camp just south of the town of Plymouth, the Rio Kid summed up their findings. Jim Bridger sat hump-shouldered on the other side of the small fire. The Rio Kid stretched out his long legs, weary after a hard day in the saddle.

"We can report back in, Jim," he said. "I reckon there's no question in our minds what's happenin'. Tod Tolliver is mighty interested in land, land that's to go to the railroad. That gives us somethin' definite to work on."

Jim Bridger nodded. "Wagh, I smell trouble in the wind."

The Rio Kid's lean face became grim. "Yuh're right. I think it'll take a heap of gunsmoke to blast Tolliver loose from his hold on the country and Corinne—him and that hidden gent he works for."

They broke camp the next morning and rode directly south to Corinne. They took their time, still checking at every little tent and cabin they came upon. The story remained the same—Todd Tolliver was somewhere in the background of the transaction over every section.

AT LAST they came again to Corinne, and again the Rio Kid was impressed by the feverish movement everywhere in town. Business boomed and every day found more people moving in to get their share of the easy money that seemed to be floating freely. The tents had grown in numbers and the traffic on the lake was heavier.

Bridger and the Rio Kid rode directly to the Union Pacific offices and reported to General Dodge. He listened to them, nodding now and then, his frown becoming deeper as the story progressed.

At last the Rio Kid leaned back in his chair.

"That's the story," he declared. "Yuh guessed right, General."

"I was afraid of that," Dodge said, as he toyed aimlessly with a pencil, "and I don't know yet what I can do about it. There has to be some way we can stop Tolliver."

The Rio Kid smiled. "I think I can work on that angle. I'm still curious about Major Fitzhugh, and Tolliver is the skunk in the woodpile. Give me a few days to work on it."

"Fair enough," Dodge agreed. "Dan Ryan is having more trouble than usual these days. The toughs are getting bolder and he's having a hard time checking them. The jail's full every night. He needs help."

"I'll give him a hand," the Rio Kid said, as he arose. "I want to see Celestino and Mary Fitzhugh. Then I'll look Dan up."

Dodge agreed. The Rio Kid left the office without Jim Bridger who was to scout ahead of the Union Pacific tracks for a likely place to set up a new warehouse. The one in Corinne was already too far behind the end-of-track.

The Rio Kid rode to the livery stable where he saw to it that Saber received the hostler's full attention. Then he left, going to Mary's tent hotel where he learned the girl was at Dr. Truman's. Bob Pryor walked to the sawbone's office with a slight smile on his lips. Mary and Doc seemed to be getting along all right.

Celestino was sitting in the little outer room. His arm was held in a sling but he had shifted his holster so that he could make a swift left-hand draw. He looked up when the Rio Kid entered, and his dark eyes lighted joyfully.

"My General, you are back, no? Eet iss fine day for Celestino."

The Rio Kid sat down beside him. "For me, too, *amigo.*" He jerked his head toward the closed office door. "Mary in there?"

Celestino grinned and winked. "*Si, si,* General. Love, she is wonderful, I theenk. Ever' day the senorita worry about thees broken arm. We see the doctor, no? I smile and see eet is love, but bad. So we look at the arm."

The Rio Kid chuckled, then sobered. "Any moves from Todd Tolliver or his friends?"

"No." Celestino shook his head. "She bad looks, *si.* Nozzing more."

"I don't like that," the Rio Kid said worriedly. "It ain't like Tolliver's breed to lay low and do nothin'. *Amigo,* I'll bet yuh a busted *peso* we have trouble from the sidewinder within a week."

Celestino grinned. "General, I weel like the trouble. *Por Dios,* I am tired of the days with nozzing to do."

The Rio Kid grinned and arose. He tapped lightly on the office door and Doc Truman opened it. Mary Fitzhugh was sitting beside his desk, star-eyed, a

soft smile on her lips. Both were glad to see him.

AFTER the greetings, the Rio Kid turned the conversation to Major Fitzhugh.

"Tolliver will sit tight and tell us nothin' so long as we don't force his hand," he said seriously.

Mary made a hopeless gesture. "What else can we do? We have no proof of anything against Uncle Todd."

The Rio Kid looked thoughtfully at her. "If yuh think yuh can take a heap of trouble, I got a plan."

"I'd face anything to learn what happened to Father!" Mary said eagerly.

"Good!" The Rio Kid smiled and nodded. "Then in the mornin' bring an injunction against Tolliver. Yuh're goin' to ask him to account for yore father's properties. When the hearin' on that injunction comes up, we'll have a smart lawyer who'll try to pull out everything Tolliver knows. We'll make the court curious as to why yore father left as sudden as he did, and why he entrusted everything to Tolliver."

Doc Truman chuckled. "I can see Tolliver sweating on the stand."

The Rio Kid looked up quickly. "Yuh're reading sign wrong, Doc. Mary can ask for the injunction but Tolliver won't let it come to trial. He can't afford to. He'll make some move to get rid of Mary Fitzhugh, and we've got to be ready for him. If we can trap him red-handed we can force the truth out of him. . . ."

At that very moment, Tolliver sat across the table from Black Judkins and three hard-faced gunnies in a back room of his big U. P. Saloon. Todd's sallow face was grim and his black eyes darted from one of the men to the other.

"Yuh got yore orders straight now?" he asked.

Judkins nodded. "Shore have. It'll be easy."

"It can't slip!" Tolliver's long finger tapped the table for emphasis. "The Rio Kid's back and Dodge is plannin' to move them tent warehouses. We've got no time to lose."

One of the gunnies rolled a quirly.

"We take care of Ryan and the Rio Kid?" he asked.

"Yuh can salivate Ryan," Tolliver said, "but I want the Rio Kid alive. I've got to know what him and that Mary Fitzhugh have discovered about her father. When the tents go up in smoke, the Rio Kid'll come runnin'. That's yore chance. I'm strikin' back. He'll find he can't blast my men down and get away with it."

Black Judkins arose and his green eyes flickered evilly.

"I want the Rio Kid when yuh finish with him, Todd."

"He'll be yores, Black, what's left of him," Tolliver promised. "Now get goin' —pronto."

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Flames in the Night*

RYAN looked up from the six he was cleaning and loading when the Rio Kid came into the little office. He pushed his hat farther back on his head and his thick lips widened in a friendly grin.

"Shure and it's good to see the lean face of yez again," he greeted. "Grab yez some shells, me bucko. I'm in need of yer sidin'."

"Dodge tells me things are gettin' bad," the Rio Kid observed, as he filled his pocket with forty-fours.

Ryan swung closed the loading gate of his six. "They are that, and gettin' worser," he agreed. "Three shootin' scrapes last night and two dead men. I've given me warnin' if this keeps up, I'll be markin' a deadline for Colts."

The Rio Kid shook his head. "Yuh'd need an army of deputies to enforce that, Dan. It won't work."

Ryan stood up, shoving the gun into leather. "That it may not but there's somethin' else that will, by Erin's green! I told 'em last night I was gettin' mighty tired fillin' up me jail. Any badmen want a ruckus, they can depend upon me shootin' first and arrestin' afterwards. That's me word."

The Rio Kid grinned. Dan Ryan was just the man to carry out that threat, and Bob Pryor had keen respect for the Irishman's gun speed.

"Tolliver's behind it, I suppose," the Kid remarked, "and Judkins. I'm shore

glad Celestino has kept Mary Fitzhugh under guard. They'd have made some play to get her."

Ryan's eyes blazed. "The spawn of Satan! They would that and I can't prove yet that they're behind it!"

He replaced the boxes of cartridges, locked the cupboard and turned around to the Rio Kid.

"I placed that breed that yez was fightin' a week ago," he said. "That Juan Onante."

The Rio Kid's face lighted. "Good. Where is he?"

Ryan's lips twisted angrily. "Yez'll not be asking him questions, me friend. Juan's dead. He was fished out of the Bear, a bullet in his leg and the black throat of him slit from ear to ear."

The Rio Kid whistled soundlessly. "Some of his friends musta been waitin' that night. He failed and they shut him up before I could drag the truth out of him. Dan, he was workin' for the man behind Tolliver. I'll bet Tolliver didn't even know that Juan was sent to get me."

Ryan moved to the door. "That may be. But right now there's a perdition town outside to be corralled. I'd like yez to go the rounds with me tonight, Kid."

The Rio Kid hitched his two gun-belts to a better position and nodded. He stepped out onto the street with Dan Ryan. Already saloons and halls were going full blast. The streets were crowded with men in search of a chance to blow off steam. A constant line of customers surged into the tents and out again. A dozen tinny pianos banged a dozen different songs at the same time.

Ryan walked slowly, the Rio Kid at his side. They had to shove their way through the crowd to make any progress at all. Several times their elbows and shoulders caused men to look angrily around. But the anger changed or was hidden when the light gleamed off the law badges on the two broad chests.

They turned in at one of the few frame saloons, a big barn of a structure. The bar took in the whole lower floor, and was a place crowded to bursting with railroad workers, drifting gentry and dance girls.

RYAN shoved his way to the bar and ordered a drink for himself and the Rio Kid. The saloon owner, a big man with a florid face and diamonds on his fat fingers, came up to them.

"No trouble here, Dan," he boomed. "Just good clean fun."

Ryan grinned lopsidedly. "Now that's nice to be hearin'. I'll hang around a bit to keep it that way."

The proprietor scowled and shoved his way toward the rear.

The Rio Kid looked over the crowd. They were a rough, tough lot, these men before him, but so far intent only on pleasure. The Rio Kid hoped nothing else would develop.

At that moment a girl screamed and a table crashed over. The crowd surged back from two struggling men who rolled along the floor, fists pumping. Ryan turned slowly and watched the fight, without moving to stop it. He tossed down his drink and placed the glass carefully on the bar.

The fighters surged apart and scrambled to their feet. One of them flashed his hand inside his coat. Dan Ryan roared angrily as a hideout gun appeared. The marshal's draw was smooth lightning and his slug smashed the gun from the man's fingers.

A quiet settled on the place. Ryan rolled forward in his cocky walk, his gun uptilted a little in his hand, but ready to snap down into action. The Rio Kid remained by the bar, his cool, keen eyes darting around the crowd. Dan Ryan's back was safe.

Ryan's long arm reached out and grabbed the man's shirt.

"Fightin' is good for a man when it's fists and fair. But I hate the sight of a sidewinder, me bucko, an it's jail for you."

He jerked savagely and the man lurched forward. Ryan's gun barrel swung downward and the man slumped unconscious. Ryan glared around the crowd.

"And do I hear objections?"

He reached down and took a firm hold of the man's collar, dragged him to the door and outside. The Rio Kid slipped along the bar, his eyes alert, then followed the marshal. He grinned slightly to himself. Dan Ryan at least had an efficient way of taking a man to jail.

Bob Pryor did not see a man with a stubbled face swing out of the crowd and rapidly walk between the saloon and

the next building. At the rear, the man who had "gunny" written all over him turned left and headed for the back entrance of the U. P. Black Judkins was waiting in the rear room.

"Ryan and the Rio Kid are at the far end of the street," the gunny reported to Judkins. "They just made an arrest."

Judkins stood up, smiling triumphantly. He turned to his gunhawk companions with an order.

"It's time we moved. Sundown, you keep them blasted lawmen busy down this way. I want that fire burnin' good before they can get to the warehouse."

"Sundown" was a slit-eyed, lantern-jawed man with a drooping eyelid. He grinned. "Me'n the boys can raise a considerable ruckus, Black," he drawled. "Yuh can take yore time."

The men left the room, splitting into two parties. Black picked up some more of Tolliver's gunhawks in the U. P. and went outside. They swung into saddles and rode at a quick trot to the northwestern section of the town. Sundown and two others sauntered carelessly in the opposite direction, but their eyes were sharp and their faces hard. . . .

THE Rio Kid stood by until Ryan had locked up his unconscious prisoner.

"That's the first," the Irishman sighed. "I bet there's a dozen in the next hour. Here we go again."

Once more the Rio Kid sided the marshal of Corinne as they walked down the plank sidewalk. Ryan dropped in again at the saloon where the fight had been to make sure there was no further trouble. There was not and the two lawmen left almost immediately. They visited the honkytonk next door. There was a great deal of noise but no trouble.

They had just touched the wood sidewalk again when gunshots blasted from across the street. Ryan was galvanized into action. His legs pumped him across the street, the Rio Kid running easily at his side. He pulled up short when a new blast of gunfire sounded from behind and farther up the street.

Ryan threw a startled look in that direction.

"Glory be! And it's two at once. Kid, would yez stop that one up there?"

The Rio Kid, whirled on his heel and started away. He pulled up short when a third blast of gunfire sounded from a third direction. Ryan's heels scored the dust as he pulled up short. His cursing was awesome.

He waved the Rio Kid on and Pryor ran to the tent dance hall where the second shooting had occurred. He found a badly-wounded man laying beside the bar and got a confused story of the fight caused by a man named Sundown. No one knew where Sundown had gone. The Rio Kid had the wounded man carted off to Doc Truman's, then hurried to find Dan Ryan.

He met the marshal on the street, a puzzled and angry Irishman. He had found a dead breed and a garbled story about a gunman who had deliberately picked a fight. There was a sudden shout behind them and a woman screamed. A six roared throatily into the night and the screams sounded again.

The Rio Kid reached the boiling crowd first. He pushed through to the center to find a man down, and a gunman with a drooping eyelid still standing in a fighting crouch. The gunman was Sundown. He looked up when the Rio Kid shoved through. His thin lips split in a challenging grin.

"Aim to argue about it, Marshal?" he demanded.

The Rio Kid shook his head. "Nope. Nothin' I want to say. I'll just stand by what Dan Ryan told you renegades."

His hand dropped down and the big Colt blurred up out of the holster. Sundown was taken flat, not expecting such a swift play. His gun leveled and he pulled trigger, but the Rio Kid was a split second ahead of him. Sundown spun half-around as the slug caught him in the side. He stumbled and fell and the Rio Kid kicked his gun to one side.

Sundown sat up, clutching at his side. His mean features were twisted in anger and pain. The Rio Kid waited a minute, his face stern.

"Had enough, hombre?" he asked then. "Goin' to the calaboose peaceful?"

Sundown glared up at him and nodded.

The Rio Kid had a couple of men from the crowd pick up Sundown and support him on his painful journey to jail. The Rio Kid locked him in a cell and left to send Doc Truman over to look at his wound.

He had just hit the street when he saw the red glow to the northwest. He stared

at the dull angry color in the night sky, trying to place where the fire might be. Dan Ryan came hurrying up, his face drawn.

"It's the railroad warehouses!" he yelled. "Get up there like all the devils in Hades are after yez!"

BOB PRYOR ran down the street toward the livery stable. He had to buck the crowd that surged eagerly toward the fire, the flames of which could be seen more clearly with each passing minute. He had Saber out of the stall and slapped blanket and saddle on his back. In another moment he jumped into saddle and touched with spurs. Saber pounded down the street.

The warehouses were some distance away and the streets were crowded by the curious. There were many delays, but, at last, the path was cleared and the Rio Kid streaked toward the burning tents, now visible just ahead. He plunged to a halt where a bucket line had already started. His quick eyes told the Rio Kid there was still a good chance of saving most of the material. So far, the flames were confined to one small area.

He saw General Dodge, and the engineer was barking orders like an Army commander.

"Pryor, take charge over there!" the General shouted. "Get all the stuff out you can!"

The Rio Kid ran in the direction Dodge had indicated. A group of men braved the flames to drag out equipment. The Rio Kid hastily ripped off his neckerchief and tied it over his nose and mouth. He darted inside.

There was a good deal of smoke, and far to the back was the red glow of flames. He grabbed a case off a stack and turned, rushing it outside. In a few minutes he had the cases coming out with almost clocklike regularity.

By now several bucket lines had formed and the fire was beginning to be brought under control. The Rio Kid paused in his labors, snatching his neckerchief off and taking deep gulps of the night air. He turned, trying to estimate the amount of damage of the fire.

It couldn't be much. Then his eyes narrowed as he saw a little flame flicker close to one of the tents that had as yet been untouched. He saw a dark stooping figure. The Rio Kid started running.

He was close to the man now and he yelled at him. The man looked up, startled. The Rio Kid had a brief glimpse of a thick black beard, then the man was gone, scurrying around the corner and darting among the shadows, seeking to hide.

Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, started after him. He had recognized Black Judkins, and if the man could be caught, this bit of arson would be pinned directly onto him and Todd Tolliver. The Rio Kid's lips thinned as he ran at top speed. A little distance ahead, he saw Judkins cut around another corner.

The Rio Kid made the corner, his long legs pumping fast. He had a quick glimpse of shadowy figures that jumped out upon him. He tried to dodge, but had no chance. A gun barrel rapped against his skull and he felt himself falling.

He hit the ground and rolled. His brain was reeling with pain, but he still tried to pull himself up. Dimly he heard an angry oath. Then something hard and solid crashed down against his skull for a second time. The Rio Kid dropped senseless.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Indian Torture*

VAGUE darkness still hovered over the Rio Kid when he regained some semblance of consciousness. It was still night, he realized.

He had a sensation of being shaken in a peculiar regular rhythm. His groggy brain grappled with the problem, but he could not seem to think clearly. Finally his eyes blinked open and he found himself looking down at the ground.

He realized that he was securely tied and that he had been thrown across a horse and roped there. The movement of the animal had caused the rhythmic shaking over which he had puzzled. His head ached as though it had been split and the jolting at every step of the horse did nothing to soothe the pain.

For a while he was aware of nothing but the pain in his head and the dark

ground that passed slowly beneath his eyes. Then as his senses became stronger he was aware of the sound of other riders, men who rode on all sides of him. He tried to raise his head but it was too much effort.

The cavalcade rode on for hours, it seemed. But, at last, just before dawn, it halted and rough hands tugged at the knots that held the Rio Kid across the horse. They were loosened, and no one made a move to keep him from falling. He landed heavily and lost consciousness again. . . .

When once again the Rio Kid's eyes opened it was daylight, and he was lying on a filthy bunk inside a little cabin. Besides the bunk, there was a rickety stove, a few chairs, a table. The cabin door was open and bright sunlight streamed in, forcing the Rio Kid to close his eyes.

His arms were still tied and his feet had been spread-eagled, each ankle securely lashed to one of the supports of the bunk. He could twist a little, but that was all. He opened his eyes again, squinting them against the painful light. Looking out the door, it came over him where he was. This was the cabin on the north tip of the lake at the edge of the swamp and marshland.

The light was abruptly blotted out as a man stepped into the doorway. He stood there, his face in deep shadow so that the Rio Kid could not recognize him. He turned abruptly and the Rio Kid heard him call: "Hey, Black! This jasper has come around!"

In a moment Black Judkins' big form filled the doorway and Tolliver's burly *segundo* came to the bunk. He stood looking down at the Rio Kid, his green eyes gleaming, and his lips sneering triumphantly through his thick beard.

"So yuh woke up, Rio Kid! Shucks, I was afraid yuh might die on us. Now that would have been too bad."

The Rio Kid tried to answer, but his voice was an unintelligible croak. Black picked up a tin can filled with water and held it to the Rio Kid's lips. Pryor drank deeply, then dropped his head back to the bunk.

He looked up at Black Judkins, his blue eyes unafraid. "Thanks," he mumbled. "That's the first decent thing yuh ever did in yore life, I reckon."

Judkins laughed and turned to his men who crowded in the doorway.

"He's feeling chipper, boys," he drawled. "I reckon he'll be strong enough to take what we give him for a while. Dusty, you ride to Tolliver and tell him our pardner is able to talk."

"About what?" the Rio Kid demanded.

"A heap of things, *amigo*." Judkins grinned more broadly. "I reckon Todd'll have his own questions, but yuh might be thinkin' about this Fitzhugh senorita and what she knows about her old man. And I reckon Todd's mighty interested in what General Dodge plans next. Yuh shore are goin' to be busy a-talkin'."

The Rio Kid smiled coldly. "I doubt that."

Judkins arose and winked. "*Amigo*, we got ways of makin' people talk. They ain't nice ways. Now me, I been down below the Mexican border and I picked up a few little tricks from the Yaquis. Them Injuns know how to pry a man's tongue loose."

The Rio Kid turned his head away.

[*Turn page*]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He heard Black Judkins leave the cabin, still chuckling in anticipation of what was to come.

Carefully the Rio Kid tested the ropes that held him, and found them tight. He couldn't get an inch of play out of them for all his efforts. He lay back on the bunk finally, conserving his strength for what was to come. . . .

BACK in Corinne, a glum little group met in Dan Ryan's office. The marshal had a bad burn across the back of his hand and Celestino's face was smoke-grimed. Jim Bridger leaned against the wall, his jaws moving regularly on his tobacco.

General Dodge, pacing up and down in the narrow aisle between dusk and door, turned abruptly to Ryan.

"I can't believe it, Dan," he declared. "We had that fire out before it spread much. Captain Pryor can take care of himself."

Ryan shrugged helplessly. "And it's me that feels bad about it, too, General. But the last I seen, the Kid was headed straight into that burnin' tent."

Dodge sighed and resumed his pacing. Celestino shifted his sling so that his arm rested more comfortably.

"Eet iss not right!" he exclaimed suddenly. "My General, he ees not *muerto!*"

"By the saints," Ryan said, his face drawn. "I'm telling yez only what I saw. The Rio Kid was goin' for that tent. That's the last he was seen around the fire or anywheres else."

Celestino sank back in his chair, his dark face glum, and his eyes sorrowful.

Jim Bridger shifted noiselessly against the wall. His old eyes traveled from one of the men to the other, lingering on Dodge, who was still pacing. He shifted his tobacco.

"Seems to me ye be talkin', and doin' nothing," he said shortly.

Dodge stopped pacing abruptly and swung around. His face showed the strain he worked under.

"What else is there to do, Bridger?" he demanded.

The old scout shrugged his scrawny shoulders. "Ye might look. Ye might keep tap on Tolliver and Black Judkins."

Ryan's fist smacked his desk. "He's right, General! I been worryin' about that fire and there's a salty jasper in my cell right now as might know somethin' about it. I'll bring him in."

He arose, grabbed the ring of keys, and disappeared into the cell block. Dodge looked sharply at Bridger, then started his pacing again. He stopped when Dan Ryan returned, shoving the wounded gunny, Sundown, ahead of him.

Sundown looked at them, a sneer on his twisted lips, his drooping eyelid giving his hawk face an evil cast. Ryan turned Sundown around to face him.

"What would yez be knowin' about that fire?" he growled angrily.

"Marshal"—Sundown grinned impudently—"what would yuh think? Seems like I was in jail when all the excitement cut loose."

"I'll be having none of yer tongue, me bucko!" Ryan's lips thinned and his face reddened with anger. "I want straight answers to straight questions."

Sundown shrugged. "Shoot. Mebbe yuh'll get one, and mebbe yuh won't."

Bridger straightened, his old eyes gleaming. He stood silently as Ryan shot another question at the gunman.

"Why did yez start that ruckus?"

Sundown grinned. "I crave excitement, lawdog."

Ryan stabbed his finger at the prisoner's chest.

"Yez wouldn't have been ordered to start somethin' to keep me and the Rio Kid safe away from the warehouse while yore pardners set the fire?"

"Marshal, now what made yuh think of that?" Sundown drawled, with an air of innocent shock.

"It's no use, Ryan," Dodge growled impatiently. "He's not talking even if he does know something. You might as well take him back to the cells."

"Now, just hold up for a minute, Gin'ral," Bridger said, as she shoved away from the wall. "I'd crave to be alone with our friend for a little bit."

DODGE turned, looking at the scout with a puzzled light in his eyes. He saw Bridger's scrawny fingers play with the handle of the heavy hunting knife. Sundown saw the gesture, too, and he didn't look so certain of himself. Dodge half-turned to look at the rest. Celestino's face lighted and his lips broke into a smile.

"Senors, I theenk maybe we do it, no?"

"Yuh can't!" Sundown gulped. He tried to back away, but Ryan shoved him back.

"Now as to that, me bucko," he said, "we'll decide. Bridger, ye'd be thinkin' yez could make him talk?"

Bridger nodded. "Yup. I know I can."

Ryan winked broadly at the rest. "Now yez wouldn't be thinking of hurting the poor prisoner?"

"Nope." Bridger's thin lips parted in a grin. "Just pry a few facts from his gizzard."

Sundown's panicky eyes darted from one to the other. They rested on General Dodge as the man in real authority.

"Don't let him!" he begged. "That old Injun'll torture me!"

Dodge smiled frostily. "Not old Jim. He's as gentle as a Blackfoot on the warpath." He jerked his head toward the door. "Ryan, I have something outside to show you. I'd like you along, too, Mireles."

Celestino arose and walked out.

"This is illegal!" Sundown shouted at Ryan. "Yuh can't let him use Injun stuff on me!"

"Jim, do Injun work?" Ryan said, and looked shocked. "Now, that I wouldn't be knowin' since I won't be here. I'll see yez later, Sundown."

He jerked away from Sundown's clutching hands and followed Dodge and Celestino out the door. It closed softly behind them.

Jim Bridger smiled frostily and his old eyes glittered. Slowly he drew the long, shining blade of the hunting knife from the scabbard. His calloused thumb gently followed the edge and his eyes bored into Sundown.

The man swallowed noisily and backed away. Bridger followed him with a lithe, silent stride. . . .

In the little cabin at the north tip of the lake, the hours passed slowly. As the sun mounted higher and the interior of the place became like an oven and the sweat streamed down the Rio Kid's face. Black Judkins came in a couple of times to gloat over his prisoner. About noon, a couple of the gunnies entered, one with a plate of food.

The Rio Kid's arms were untied and he ate under the menace of a drawn gun. When he had finished he was trussed up again.

As he lay staring out the door at the sun-drenched world his mind was busy with possible ways of escape. Right now it looked pretty hopeless, and he discarded plan after plan. Finally the Rio Kid gave it up. He would have to wait until Tolliver came, and take advantage of any break he might get.

He closed his eyes and tried to rest. He must have fallen asleep, for he jerked to consciousness when he heard a loud hail outside. He opened his eyes as Tolliver and Judkins came in the doorway. The gun boss of Corinne stood over him, his long, sallow face sweaty, his dark eyes glittering. He pulled up a chair and sat down.

"I got a visit from Dan Ryan early this mornin'," he said flatly. "I got a subpoena to appear in court. Mary Fitzhugh has asked for an injunction and an accountin' of her father's property."

The Rio Kid smiled. "If yuh ain't been cheatin', that shouldn't worry yuh."

"It don't. I figger Mary Fitzhugh won't be around when the thing comes to trial. The case will be dropped."

TOLLIVER pulled a long cheroot out of his pocket. He bit off the end, and carefully lighted it. His shallow eyes studied the Rio Kid.

"What does she know about her father?" he demanded.

Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, grinned. "Now yuh'll find that out at the trial."

Tolliver said nothing, taking a deep drag on the cigar.

"I intend to find out from you," he said, after a long silence.

"I ain't talkin'," the Rio Kid stated flatly.

Tolliver smiled, a cold breaking of the thin lips.

"I got other ideas," he said confidently. "And mebbe yuh can tell me somethin' else. I've heard Dodge is askin' the President to name a point where the U. P. and Central will make a junction. Where is it?"

The Rio Kid shook his head. "I don't know."

"Yuh're stubborn," Tolliver grunted. "What does Dodge plan to do about me? How does he plan to settle the land subsidies?"

"Yuh got more talk than a Piute Injun, Tolliver," the Rio Kid sighed. "I reckon if yuh hang around long enough,

yuh'll find out without askin' questions."

Tolliver arose. "I don't intend to wait. You'll tell me."

The Rio Kid shook his head. Tolliver half-turned and called to Black Judkins.

"I guess you'll have to work on him, Black," he said shortly. "I'll hang around till he talks."

## CHAPTER XV

### *Rescue*

JUDKINS grinned, went to the door, and called in a couple of his gunmen. They quickly untied the Rio Kid's ankles and jerked him from the bunk. He was led outside and the hot sunlight made him blink.

Judkins led the way and halted in a little circular clearing covered with hot sand. He pulled a gun and trained it on the Rio Kid, licking his lips as though already enjoying what was to come.

"All right, boys," he ordered. "Set them stakes good and deep. After a while he'll do some pullin' and we don't want 'em comin' loose."

The two men drove four long stakes into the ground and the Rio Kid knew what was coming. Black Judkins *had* borrowed something from the Yaquis.

The men straightened and grabbed the Rio Kid. He was thrown flat on his back and his ankles lashed to two of the stakes. They slashed the bonds that held his arms, then tied his arms to the two remaining stakes. Finished, they stood up.

The Rio Kid squinted his eyes against the sun.

"How about the rest of it, Judkins?" he asked coolly.

Black chuckled, then sighed regretfully. "Not this time. I'll leave yore eyelids on, but we'll take that shirt."

His heavy hand ripped the Rio Kid's shirt off, leaving the skin exposed to the broiling heat of the sun. He stepped back and looked at the spread-eagled prisoner.

"Still ain't talkin'?" he asked.

"No." The Rio Kid shook his head. "I got nothin' to say."

Judkins turned away.

"I'll be in the cabin when he's changed his mind," he told his men. "Yuh can just hunker down in the shade somewheres and let the sun work on him."

He walked away and the two gunmen stood beside the Rio Kid, rolling cigarettes. They lit them and one flipped the still-burning match onto the Rio Kid's chest. The burn was sharp and painful but the flame quickly went out. The gunhawk laughed and walked away, his companion following him.

The Rio Kid kept his eyes closed, but he heard the two men sit down not far away. Bob Pryor gritted his teeth. Already the hot rays of the sun were baking his face and he knew what agonies lay before him.

It looked like the end now. Even if, in time, Dan Ryan should find him, it would be too late.

He could not even guess that already, while he had dozed on the bunk in the cabin, that out of Corinne two riders had streaked, setting spurs to their horses.

The man in the lead had been a young Mexican, his face set in a strained, angry expression. His companion was an old man who carried a long rifle. They headed directly toward the cabin at the north point of the Great Salt Lake.

Celestino threw a glance back at Jim Bridger. His words seemed wrenched from him.

"Eet ees to hurry, senor. My General, he ees to die, no?"

Bridger didn't waste words, but urged greater speed out of the horse. The miles sped by and at last they approached the marshland that headed the lake. Bridger called to Celestino, sharply, to halt the man's headlong rush.

"Ye'd best scout a bit, younker. Ain't no use us gettin' our scalps lifted, too."

Celestino angrily pulled on the reins with his one good arm. He looked around impatiently.

"But thees Sundown, he say where ees my General!"

Bridger dismounted and led the horse behind a high clump of bushes.

"Shore, but he didn't say how many renegades was there. Ye got to think of that, younker."

Celestino sighed and awkwardly dismounted, favoring his bad arm. He led his mount beside Bridger's and

waited until the old scout had checked the priming in his rifle. Bridger looked up, got his bearings, and silently struck off through the marshland. Celestino followed him.

In a short while they came to the cabin and Bridger wriggled forward on his stomach for a closer inspection. His old eyes narrowed when he saw Todd Tolliver and Black Judkins come to the door and walk toward the horses that stood, heads down, a few feet away.

Judkins laughed and his booming voice carried clearly to the old scout.

"I'll hang around, Todd," he said, "till that Rio Kid talks."

Tolliver nodded. "Keep him alive. We'll use him as hostage if anything goes wrong."

"Shucks," Judkins said, grinning, "us gettin' that pay train will be easy, Todd. That'll stop the U. P. dead in its tracks and besides, we'll have all that *dinero* to divide."

Tolliver looked sharply at his *segundo,* then dropped his eyes. He threw the reins over his mount's head and swung into saddle. "Ride right in as soon as our man gets his tongue to workin'," he ordered. "I'll be waitin' for yuh."

Judkins peered up at the hot sun. "It won't be long," he promised. "Ain't nobody can take a stake-out and not crack."

Tolliver nodded and pulled his horse around. Judkins stopped him before he could ride off.

"What about the girl?" he asked.

"That Mexican of the Rio Kid's and Ryan's men have been guardin' her too close," the gun boss of Corinne growled, frowning angrily. "But I'll get her and shut her up like I did her father. I got that *dinero* and I'm goin' to hang onto it. Report in as soon as yuh can, Black."

He set spurs to his horse and rode quickly away, headed for Corinne. Black Judkins stood, hands on hips, watching his boss grow smaller in the distance. He looked up at the sun again, then half-turned, his eyes studying a dim trail that cut into the marshland. He shrugged and returned to the cabin as though he had decided the sun needed a little more time.

Bridger remained quiet for several minutes after Judkins had disappeared. Then he cautiously wriggled back to where Celestino impatiently waited. The young Mexican looked up, his face eager.

"You have learned where my General ees?"

Bridger nodded. "Unlimber yore hardware. We're goin' after him."

Celestino snaked the Colt from his left holster and fell in behind Jim Bridger. The old scout cut directly into the marshes in a direction that would bring them to the trail that led from the cabin. The farther they went, the more careful Bridger was not to make noise. Their progress was slow and Celestino gritted his teeth against his impatience.

Suddenly Bridger stopped, raising his hand in warning. Cautiously he parted a tangle of bushes and peered out into a circular clearing. Celestino stared over his shoulder. His lips clamped shut when he saw the man staked out on the ground in the brilliant sunshine.

Bridger's hand checked the Mexican's sudden move. The old scout shoved the barrel of his long rifle through the bushes and took a careful aim at one of the two men sprawled in the shade across the little clearing.

"H'ist 'em, fellers!" he snapped. "Ye're covered squar'."

THE two renegades froze, their heads snapping around in surprise. They spotted the menacing rifle barrel and slowly their hands came up into the air. Bridger chuckled drily.

"They're hitched, younker," he said to Celestino. "Pull their fangs."

Celestino cut around the old scout and broke through the bushes. He saw the Rio Kid turn his head and the tortured eyes open, but the young Mexican didn't stop. He holstered his six and pulled the renegades' gun with his good hand. He pitched them far into the marsh grass. Then his own Colt covered them.

"Cut heem loose!" he ordered briefly.

The two gunmen scrambled to their feet. Bridger stepped into sight, the old rifle still covering the prisoners. One of the gunmen pulled a knife, bent down, and hastily slashed the ropes that held the Rio Kid to the stakes.

"Help him up, younker," Bridger said. "I got these snakes covered."

Celestino quickly bent to the aid of his General. The Rio Kid staggered as he stood up. His face was red from

the sun and he took a few groggy steps before he seemed to get control of himself. Then he straightened.

"I'd crave a drink," he said thickly.

Celestino saw the big canteen the two gunhawks had brought with them. He picked it up and handed it to the Rio Kid who twisted off the cap and drank sparingly. He lowered the canteen and Celestino could almost see new life come into Bob Pryor's frame. After a short wait, the Rio Kid drank again.

He took Celestino's six then, broke it open. Satisfied that it was loaded, he turned to Jim Bridger.

"Hold these lobos here," he said. "I got a little pow-wowin' to do with their boss."

The old scout jerked his head toward the trail. "Tolliver done left. T'other skunk's still hangin' around, though."

"That's the one I mean." The Rio Kid nodded. "Yuh can trail these polecats up to the cabin in a little while. I reckon I'll be through."

He shoved Celestino's Colt in one of his empty holsters and took another deep drink from the canteen. Hitching up his gun-belt then, he started down the trail to the cabin, which was quite a distance away.

Celestino and Bridger watched him go. The Mexican nervously shifted around a few minutes, then started down the trail after him.

Bridger motioned slightly with his rifle toward the bushes.

"Ye might squat a while, gunnies. This ain't goin' to be long."

They eyed the rifle and walked slowly to the shade. Under Bridger's watchful eyes, they sat down. One of them looked up, a crooked grin on his lips.

"Yuh shore hit it right, old-timer," he said. "It won't be long, and Judkins'll be back here to make mincemeat out of you."

The old scout chuckled. "I'll just make a leetle bet against that. Any amount ye say."

Out of sight on the trail, the Rio Kid walked slowly, strength flowing back into his legs and arms. He flexed the fingers of his right hand, working the circulation back into them again. His lean face was stern, his lips a gash above his square jaw.

When he saw the cabin ahead, he stopped. Black Judkins was not in sight, and the door was open. The Rio Kid's keen blue eyes swept the clearing and out across the flats toward Corinne. He saw no one.

Satisfied, he started a slow walk toward the cabin, his muscles tensed, ready to go into a fighting crouch at the first sign of alarm. He reached the doorway, paused. He caught a light snore from the bunk.

The Rio Kid lightly stepped inside and waited, adjusting his eyes to the darkness. Black Judkins was sprawled on the bunk asleep, his cavernous mouth open. The Rio Kid pulled a cartridge from his belt and threw it at the sleeping man. It caught him on the cheek.

Black Judkins snorted awake and reared up in the bunk. His sleepy eyes tried to focus, but they were blinded by the light streaming in the doorway. He blinked them, trying to adjust them to the dim interior.

"Take yore time, Black," the Rio Kid said quietly. "This is a showdown and I want to give yuh an even break."

Judkins' head snapped around and he saw the Rio Kid for the first time. His mouth dropped open in amazement and his green eyes rounded.

"How did you get loose?" he blurted.

The Rio Kid smiled coldly. "Some friends of mine, Judkins. They got yore boys corralled."

"What yuh aim to do?" Judkins said, without moving from the bunk.

"I aim to give yuh a chance to go for yore hogleg," the Rio Kid said coldly. "We'll start even and that's more of a chance than yuh gave me."

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Judkins Pays Off*

PRYOR stepped away from the wall and almost imperceptibly dropped into a crouch. His hand taloned out over his holstered six, his blue eyes bored at Judkins' face.

Judkins slowly slipped his legs off the bunk and stood up. His gun-belt was around his waist, the six snug in the holster.

Black Judkins carefully eased himself away from the bunk, never taking his eyes from the Rio Kid. Little lambent flames flickered in their depths and it was clear that he figured he had an advantage. Probably he believed the Rio Kid would be weakened and slowed by his long exposure to the sun.

"A man who'd stake another out in a broiling sun deserves to die, Judkins," the Rio Kid said, his voice level and deadly. "He ain't got no decency in him. Slap leather and come smokin'!"

Judkins stood stock-still, not moving a muscle. Then abruptly his hand raked his six from leather and swung it up. The Rio Kid's fingers taloned down and his six blurred up into line. Both guns roared at once, the sound deafening in the little room.

The Rio Kid heard Judkins' slug smack into the wall beside his head. Judkins staggered as the Rio Kid's bullet caught him in the side. He triggered desperately, blinded by gunsmoke.

The cabin was hazy with swirling smoke and the Rio Kid could only see a weaving shadow to mark Black Judkins. He stood in a crouch, firing calmly and with deadly precision. He heard Judkins' lead whine past him.

Abruptly Black Judkins stopped firing. The Rio Kid waited, his eyes probing into the gunsmoke. He heard Judkins' deep sob, then the thud of a falling body.

The smoke cleared a little, trailing in long wisps out the open door. The Rio Kid saw Judkins lying on the floor. The man was vainly trying to push himself to his feet.

The Rio Kid stepped closer, his six ready in case this was some trick. It was not. A trickle of blood from his lips soaked into Judkins' black beard. He looked up at the Rio Kid, his green eyes baleful.

"Yuh called the showdown," he gasped painfully. "Yuh won. But it's the end of yore string."

"It's not, Black," the Rio Kid assured. "I'm goin' after Todd, and I'm nailin' him. Yuh're cashin' in, Black. Can't yuh tell me the name of the man behind Tolliver? It'll save a heap of gunsmoke."

Black stared at him, his green eyes slowly glazing. There was a rattle deep in his throat.

"Yuh—can go plumb—to blazes, Rio Kid!"

He slumped forward on his face and Bob Pryor knew he was dead.

The Rio Kid came to his feet. He was as far from the solution of the mystery as ever. . . .

It was late that night when the Rio Kid rode wearily into Corinne flanked by Celestino and Jim Bridger. They drove the two tied gunmen ahead of them, headed for Dan Ryan's jail. The Rio Kid reeled in the saddle from sheer weariness and, once back in Corinne, he asked Bridger to turn the captured gunhawks over to Ryan.

Celestino rode with the Rio Kid to the hotel and practically guided him up the stairs. Once in his room, Pryor threw himself full length on the bed and at once went sound asleep.

Celestino stood over him a moment, his dark eyes clouded. Then he pulled a chair up to the door and sat down in it. He tipped it back so that anyone trying to enter would shake and awaken him. The young Mexican slouched down into a comfortable position and soon his head nodded as his weary eyes closed.

The bright morning sun awakened the Rio Kid. He sat up, still a little sleepy, but immensely refreshed. He turned, saw Celestino still slumped in his chair. The Rio Kid grinned and awakened the Mexican. Celestino yawned and stretched the ache out of his back.

AS THE Rio Kid cleaned up and dressed, he threw questions at his companion.

"So Sundown was afraid Bridger would carve him in little chunks, and he talked?" he asked.

"*Si*, General," Celestino said, grinning. "Thees Sundown he ees much in love weeth his skin. Senor Ryan and the General Dodge, they no let Bridger cut thees Sundown. But Sundown, he not know that. He talk. We ride fast and find you."

The Rio Kid laughed. "A bluff's sometimes as good as the real thing. Is Bridger comin' around?"

At that moment the door opened and the old scout slipped silently inside.

"Howdy," he grunted. "I reckon we'll see the gin'ral."

The Rio Kid nodded and finished dressing. He checked his sixes and

shoved them back in the holster.

"First we eat," he said. "Then I want to see Mary Fitzhugh. After that, General Dodge."

"I reckon he'll want to know right away about that pay train," Bridger said, a little uncertainly.

The Rio Kid patted his holster. "We'll take care of that. It don't come until late tomorrer. I'll only be a minute talkin' to the girl."

They stopped at a small eating place where the Rio Kid and Celestino ate a huge breakfast. Jim Bridger sat restlessly on one of the stools and scowled at the few people in the place this early in the morning.

Afterward, the Rio Kid went to Mary's tent. One of Ryan's men was sprawled in a chair in the big main room, and he nodded briefly to the Rio Kid.

"Ain't nobody been around yet," he reported.

Bob Pryor looked pleased. "Be extra careful the next few days. Tolliver is shore to make some sort of a try to reach her."

He had the motherly Irish woman announce him and in a few moments Mary Fitzhugh came hurrying into the main room. The Rio Kid took her to one side, his face grave.

"Jim Bridger heard Tolliver and Judkins talkin' yesterday," he told her, "and I reckon it means bad news for yuh."

Her violet blue eyes clouded. "You mean they've killed—"

The Rio Kid's nod interrupted her. "It sounds that way, Mary, and I wouldn't put it past yore uncle. I aim to get positive proof. Todd also threatened to get you out of the way, so's that this injunction and accountin' suit yuh brought will never come to trial. Yuh got to stay right close, and one of Ryan's boys will always be around."

Her lips quivered, then steadied and settled in a firm line.

"Captain Pryor," she said, "if Uncle Todd killed my father, I want him brought to justice."

The Rio Kid nodded. "That's exactly what I aim to do. I got to be reportin' to General Dodge now. Remember—stay close to the hotel and take no chances."

"I promise," she said, and the Rio Kid was satisfied.

There was more movement in the streets when the three men left the hotel. They cut through a long string of slow-moving freight wagons to the opposite sidewalk and hurried ahead to the offices of the Union Pacific. Already the office hummed, and they were quickly admitted to General Dodge.

He looked as if he had not slept. His eyes were red-rimmed, his face haggard, and it looked thinner than ever. Dan Ryan stood by the window and turned, a wide smile on his homely face when he saw the Rio Kid.

"Whist! And ye'd be back again! Irishmen and divils are hard to kill."

THE Rio Kid grinned and turned to General Dodge.

"I think we have enough on Tolliver so's we can start to clean up Corinne," he said.

"I'm thankful of that." Dodge sighed. "How about the man behind him?"

The Rio Kid shrugged and sat down in a chair.

"He's still unknown, and I can't get a line on him. Nobody but Todd Tolliver seems to know who he is. Either that, or Tolliver has collected the most close-mouthed band of gunhawks I've ever been unlucky enough to run into. But with Tolliver out of the way, our man'll have to work alone. He's bound to show his hand."

Dodge passed his own hand wearily over his haggard face. "How do you plan to get Todd Tolliver?" he wanted to know.

The Rio Kid leaned forward. "Tomorrer, Celestino, Bridger and me will ride to Ogden and pick up the pay train. We'll ride it in. Tolliver plans to rob it somewheres between here and Ogden."

Dodge dropped his hand as if he had been shot. His eyes bugged out for a moment, then his lips angrily snapped shut. His fist crashed down on the desk.

"Rob the payroll! I'll have that man in jail in ten minutes! I can't run the chance of losing the payroll. It will stop construction dead in its tracks."

The Rio Kid shook his head. "General, you can't arrest Todd Tolliver yet. He hasn't done anything. If we three are on the train and his men jump it, then yuh can put Tolliver behind bars for twenty years. That's the smart move."

Dodge left his chair and paced to the window and back. He shook his head.

"I see your point," he admitted, "but I just can't run the risk."

"All right," the Rio Kid sighed. "How will yuh hold Tolliver? On what charges?"

Dodge stopped pacing to stare at the Rio Kid. He suddenly threw his arms wide in a gesture of defeat.

"All right, you win. Meet the pay train. But, Pryor, you'd better be right. If anything goes wrong and we lose that payroll, all our plans blow up in our faces."

"I understand that, General," the Rio Kid said soberly, "but there's nothin' else we can do. I know this move will pin robbery on Tolliver. I hope to pin the murder of Major Fitzhugh on him before long."

Dodge stared. "Murder? Major Fitzhugh?"

He listened while the Rio Kid told what Jim Bridger had overheard. General Dodge's face grew dark with anger.

"Fitzhugh was a good man and a fine officer," he said then. "I hope we can hang Tolliver higher than the Uintas!"

Bridger shoved away from the wall.

"Reckon we can, sooner or later," he put in.

"I'll give you passes and orders to admit you as guards to the pay-car," Dodge said, as he returned to his desk. "You'd better get to riding if you want to pick the train up at Ogden."

Hastily he scribbled a note, then filled in three blank pass forms. He extended them across the desk to the Rio Kid, and smiled.

"Good luck, Pryor. I guess I won't rest easy until that pay train comes safely in."

The Rio Kid arose. "It'll come in, all right," he assured the general.

Dodge made a halting motion with his hand.

"By the way, I've finally settled the junction point argument. It's to be Promontory Point. I'll have to tell Claude Mantin, since he's worked so closely with me, but other than Mantin and you three that news is to be a secret for a day or two."

"Promontory Point?" The Rio Kid looked puzzled. "But General, the rails go clean to Humboldt Wells over in Nevada."

"That's what comes of greedy, land-hungry men directing a couple of railroads," Dodge said disgustedly. "So far as they're concerned we could build through to the Pacific Ocean and the C. P. could extend its rails east to Omaha. We'd have two rival railroads running side by side clear across the continent just for the sake of the subsidies. That's over now. It'll be announced shortly."

The Rio Kid moved to the door.

"We'll be ridin' to Odgen," he said. "See yuh tomorrer, General."

"With the money," Dodge warned, as his face tightened.

The Rio Kid grinned. "With the *dinero*."

He left the office, Celestino and Jim Bridger crowding close behind him. Just as they came out on the street they met Claude Mantin, the man who was the most prominent business man in the Frontier town, heading toward the U. P. offices. Mantin smiled at them and stopped. He looked admiringly at the Rio Kid. "I've been hearing a lot of things about you, Pryor," he said, in a congratulatory tone. "I only wish the Union Pacific had more men like you."

The Rio Kid flushed and shook his head.

"I just ride around, Mr. Mantin," he drawled, "and things work out. I reckon the general's got some important things to say to you."

Mantin nodded. "So I understand. I'll see you around."

## CHAPTER XVII

### *Outsmarted*

MANTIN hurried into the building and the Rio Kid led the way to the livery stable and their horses.

Directly across country, skirting an east-jutting arm of the lake, it was some twenty-five miles to Ogden. Since they had until the middle of the next morning to get there to meet the pay train, the Rio Kid did not press for speed. The three of them rode leisurely.

It was one of the few times since he had been at Corinne that the Rio Kid did not have to rush. Even old Jim Bridger seemed to appreciate the chance to loaf along the trail. He lost his usual taciturnity and talked at great length of the old days of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company men in this region and their struggle to take trapping grounds from the Hudson's Bay Company.

The Rio Kid and Celestino listened, thrilled by the exploits of men long since dead, men who had made certain that this great country west of the distant Mississippi would belong to the United States. The ride was long, but it seemed no time at all until they came into Ogden.

Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, immediately reported to the railroad official at Ogden. He presented General Dodge's written order and the passes. They were okayed and the official told them what time they could catch the pay train going back to Corinne.

"Be here on the dot," he warned. "The train'll carry a heap of *dinero* and we don't like to have her just settin' around."

Early the next morning, the three of them wandered around Ogden, taking in the sights. They rode up to the railroad station about fifteen minutes before the train was due in from the east. The station master came bustling up. Behind him was a thin man with slouched shoulders, and with crossed gun-belts around his waist.

The station master jerked his thumb at the man.

"This is Curt Bristow," he introduced. "General Dodge sent him along late last night. He's to ride with yuh."

The Rio Kid was a little surprised as he shook hands with Bristow. But the fellow had the cold-eyed steadiness that spoke of the fighting man. He looked as if he were able to handle his guns.

The pay train soon rolled in, the horses were loaded, and the four men entered the pay-car. The Rio Kid closed the doors tightly and locked them.

"Might get a little hot, but nobody can get in from the outside," he commented.

Bristow nodded and smiled. "Smart move."

The train pulled out for its short run to Corinne. The shotgun guard, provided by the railroad, seemed glad to have company and he relaxed after Dodge's orders were shown to him.

"Well, I reckon we're safe enough," he said. "We got one more town to stop at—Brigham City—and mebbe a sidin' if a work train is scheduled east. We can just take her easy and not worry about the *dinero*."

The wheels clicked rhythmically over the rails. The railroad guard stretched out lazily on a long box. Celestino and Jim Bridger sat down on the floor near him.

For a time, the Rio Kid and Bristow peered out the dusty windows of the express car at the landscape that rolled swiftly by. Then the Rio Kid joined Celestino. Bristow remained by the door.

Time passed and shortly the men felt the train slow up. Bristow half turned.

"Brigham City," he said laconically, and returned to peering outside. The rest relaxed.

FOR a time they heard heavy thuds as freight and baggage was loaded into the car behind them. Voices sounded outside, then they heard the conductor's loud yell. The locomotive pulled deeply and the train jerked. They were on the last short leg of their journey to Corinne.

They had not rolled for long when the train slowed again and the Rio Kid sensed they were going into a switch. There must be an eastbound work train coming from Corinne. Bristow was again peering out the narrow windows.

Abruptly the silence was broken by the thunder of gunfire. A man's muffled scream sounded. The Rio Kid jumped to his feet. At the same instant Bristow whirled and his two sixes blurred out of the holsters. They lined down, covering the four stunned men at the end of the car.

"Hold her tight!" Bristow's voice was cold. "We're takin' this *dinero*, hombres!"

The Rio Kid froze, his hands an inch above his guns. The railroad guard cursed and gingerly shoved his shotgun away from him with the toe of his boot. Bristow grinned at the gesture, but the grin was not pleasant.

Outside, guns continued to blast and then sharply broke off. Bristow hol-

stered one of his sixes and unlocked the door with his free hand.

He stepped to one side as heavy feet crunched on the cinders and the door rolled back.

"Come on in," Bristow clipped. "I got these jaspers hitched. Pull their irons."

The bandits jumped up into the car. Two of them quickly disarmed the Rio Kid, Celestino and Jim Bridger. The railroad guards pointed mutely to the shotgun at his feet. The Rio Kid stood calm, his arms in the air, as the bandits pulled out the heavy pay-chest and one of them shot off the lock. They quickly transferred the greenbacks and coins to big canvas sacks.

"I reckon yuh belong to Todd Tolliver's string of killers," the Rio Kid drawled to Bristow.

Bristow flushed angrily, but then quickly calmed down.

"Mebbe," he said. "Mebbe not. Yuh talk too much."

The Rio Kid remained silent while the robbers completed the job. The three of them jumped down out of the car and Bristow edged to the door.

"If any of yuh shows yore head for the next five minutes," he warned, "yuh won't have none. Savvy?"

He jumped out and pushed the car door closed. Celestino darted forward, but the Rio Kid checked him.

"Hold it, *amigo*. We ain't got irons and that killer meant what he said."

"But thees *pesos*, they gone!" Celestino objected excitedly.

The Rio Kid shrugged. "Mebbe. But I reckon I know where I can put my fingers on that *dinero*. Besides, the man behind Tolliver tipped his hand. Bristow was his man and was sort of insulted when I put Tolliver's brand on him. Just stand hitched, *amigo*. We'll call the showdown in our own way and time."

"I shore hope yore right, younker," old Jim Bridger sighed. "Dodge'll chaw yore hide off for this."

"I'm right," the Rio Kid said grimly. "There's just no other answer than the one I got. We get back to Corinne, we start cleanin' house."

They heard the fading pound of hoofs and knew that the bandits had left. The Rio Kid rolled the door aside and jumped down to the ground. Frightened heads popped from car windows and some of the bolder passengers streamed from the coaches several cars to the rear.

"They plugged my fireman!" the engineer called from the cab window. "Them buzzards'll hang for killin' Wyatt!"

THE conductor hurried forward, his eyes big with excitement. They heard the whistle of the work train and the conductor grabbed up red flags and hurried down the track to stop it.

The Rio Kid learned that not only had the fireman been killed, but that a couple of passengers were wounded. They were loaded on the work train headed for Brigham City, the nearest place where a doctor could be found.

When the work train continued east, the Rio Kid climbed back in the looted pay-car. Celestino and Jim Bridger stood glumly beside him in the open door as their train came back onto the main line and continued west toward Corinne.

The trip was not long and, as soon as their mounts had been unloaded, the three friends rode fast to the Union Pacific offices. They were the first to bring the news to Dodge. The general stared at them, haggard-eyed, and the Rio Kid could see his anger mount.

"General," he asked quickly, "did yuh give an order for a gent named Bristow to help us guard the pay car?"

"I did not!" Dodge said, most emphatically, and the Rio Kid nodded.

"Then the order was forged," he said, "and this Bristow gent couldn't have done the forgin' hisself and got away with it."

"I don't give a whoop in Gehenna who forged what!" Dodge shouted, his face growing red. "Where's that *dinero?*"

The Rio Kid straightened. "I'll get it for yuh. I'll have it by mornin'."

"Captain Pryor," Dodge said calmly, but his voice was edged. "I've had the greatest confidence in you and I've never known you to fall down on a job. But you let the payroll slip out of your fingers. I still have enough confidence to take your word that you'll recover the money not later than early morning. But, Captain Pryor, it had better be here—right here in this office."

The Rio Kid flushed, hot words on his lips. But he forced them back as he looked hard at General Dodge and snapped:

"Yes, sir. The money will be here."

He jammed his hat on his head and strode from the room. Celestino trotted after him, a worried look on his dark face. He halted the Rio Kid as they reached the street. "General, thees ees bad, no? What we do now?"

"We see Dan Ryan," the Rio Kid said angrily, his voice shaking. "I'm goin' to need his boys."

He strode way up the street to the marshal's office. Dan Ryan was not there and one of his men suggested he might be at Mary Fitzhugh's hotel. The Rio Kid spun on his heel and walked away again.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *Manhunt*

EXCITEMENT was in the air at the hotel where the Rio Kid found Dan Ryan. And the commotion seemed to be centered about Mary Fitzhugh's room. The Rio Kid pushed through the crowd at the door and instantly his eyes centered on the big marshal bending over a man sprawled out on the floor.

The Rio Kid's eyes swiveled toward Mary, who sat in a chair while Doc Truman placed bandages around her white shoulder. One of Ryan's men had his arm in a sling and his face was twisted with pain.

Ryan looked up, his eyes hard and cold. He nodded grimly to the Rio Kid.

"One of Todd's boys tried to take care of the girl," he said. "Pete over there stopped him."

The Rio Kid bent down. The dead man was one the Rio Kid remembered having seen in the U. P. Saloon.

"How'd it happen?" he asked.

"This hombre slipped in while Pete was drowsy," Ryan growled. "Pete's been on duty almost twenty-four hours and I reckon he just couldn't keep awake any longer. Celestino has been relievin' Pete and he's been with you."

The Rio Kid nodded. "Mary might have been killed."

"She came mighty close as it was," Ryan snorted. "Pete heard her scream and he came tearin'. Todd's man already had his gun out and Pete let fly with a slug just as the sidewinder fired. I reckon Pete was just a little faster. Anyhow, the killer's bullet nicked Miss Mary in the shoulder, and then the black bucko turned to shoot it out with Pete. Pete got him. See? Here's the wounds."

Ryan pointed to bullet-holes, one puncturing the shoulder near the neck and the second dead center over the heart. The Rio Kid's face was grim when he crossed the room to Mary.

She was white-faced but Doc Truman's reassuring smile was enough for the Rio Kid.

Mary looked up at him and managed a trembly smile.

"I guess I'm real Western now," she said weakly. "I've been shot."

"I don't want you talking," Doc Truman said. His voice was gruff, but there was a quivering undertone to it. "And you're going straight to bed for an hour or so as soon as I finish this dressing."

The Rio Kid looked relieved. "It's not bad, then?"

Truman shook his head. "Not too bad, but she's lost blood. I expect she'll always have a scar along that shoulder, though. Pryor, I'm going to do some gunning for this outrage!"

The Rio Kid smiled frostily. "Fair enough, Doc. You string along with me and yuh'll have yore fun." He turned his attention to Mary. "Yuh needn't worry any more," he told her. "Tolliver is just about at the end of his string. Some time this afternoon we'll have him dead to rights. Tomorrer yuh can go around town without fear of bein' murdered, and tomorrer yuh'll come into yore father's property. I can promise yuh that."

She smiled faintly, but it was a sad smile. "I'd far rather have my Father," she said simply.

The Rio Kid turned hastily away and joined Dan Ryan at the door. The dead body was being carried out and the marshal was breaking up the crowd of curious who craned and peered inside. Order restored once again, the Rio Kid and Celestino went with the marshal to his office.

Ryan sank into his chair wearily.

"Kid," he said, "by the saints of Ireland, I'm about ready to turn in me badge. Shure and this thing's gettin'

worse and there's nothin' the likes of me can seem to be doin' about it."

THE Rio Kid stopped his pacing and turned toward the desk.

"Yuh're wrong, Dan," he said. "It ends tonight, if yuh'll work with me."

Ryan's eyes widened as he stared at the Rio Kid, and then he snorted:

"Work with ye! As if I wouldn't be breakin' me neck to rid this town of the scum! What should I be doin' for yez?"

The Rio Kid sat down in a chair and stared thoughtfully out the door to the busy street. "The Union Pacific payroll train was robbed this mornin'," he said, after a moment.

Ryan's angry, blasphemous roar interrupted him. The marshal came out of the chair as though a skyrocket were tied to his coat. His eyes blazed.

"And ye'd be heapin' more troubles on me!" he accused. "Ye'd not be sayin' nothing until now and I have a posse to gather up! Ye blasted—" He stopped for sheer lack of breath.

The Rio Kid checked his move, to circle the desk.

"Hold it, Dan. Yuh'll need no posse yet and there's no need to scour the country between here and Brigham City. That payroll will be slipped into Corinne tonight."

"Slipped in—here?" Ryan demanded, and the Rio Kid nodded.

"Yes. Tolliver's men held up the train, and Todd's not goin' to let that *dinero* slip out of his hands. It'll come right here. Can yuh have some of yore boys ready?"

"Right now!" Dan Ryan blurted.

"No, not right away. We have to let Tolliver's men slip that money in. They can't be suspicious that we know anything about it. When it's all in Tolliver's safe, we take it. And Todd Tolliver along with the *dinero*."

Dan Ryan sank back in his chair. "Kid, and ye'd be havin' something there. But what about the blackguard that's been hidin' behind Todd?"

"We'll get him, too," the Rio Kid said, with a confident smile. "But I want Todd first, for robbery. I think we'll have a murder charge all shined up and waitin' for him, too. But we'll see about that."

He arose and stretched, the muscles flexing along his supple body.

"I'll get some shut-eye right now, Dan. This promises to be a busy day."

The Rio Kid left the office and wandered slowly along the streets. He was close to his hotel when Claude Mantin came bustling along. Instantly Mantin halted, a smile on his lips.

"Captain Pryor," he said, "I'm glad you escaped harm in that holdup."

The Rio Kid nodded. "So am I. Been to see General Dodge?"

"Just left him," Mantin answered. "He says that you think you can recover the payroll. I certainly hope you can."

The Rio Kid looked up sharply. "Did the General say when?"

Mantin shook his head. "No. I gathered it would be soon, though."

"That's right," the Rio Kid replied. "I think I recognized one of them jaspers. He has a cabin up near Plymouth. Dan and me'll be ridin' out in the mornin', if the sheriff up there ain't picked the hombre up already."

Mantin beamed and rubbed his hands.

"That sounds good, Pryor, very good. I certainly hope you get every dime of that payroll back. It's worried General Dodge considerably."

"I reckon it has," the Rio Kid chuckled. "Say, Mr. Mantin, did you ever know Brigham Young?"

The big businessman looked puzzled. "I know of him, of course. Who in Utah doesn't? But I've never met him personally."

"Too bad," the Rio Kid said, with a shake of his head. "I reckon he could swing a heap of business to yore river boats."

Mantin laughed. "Don't you worry about that, Captain. My boats bring most of the Mormon produce to the rail line now. It's trans-shipped right here at Corinne."

"I heard some time back," the Rio Kid told Mantin, "that Brigham Young was tryin' to get a rail connection south at Ogden. Seems like he plans to have his people do their own shippin' at the U. P.'s tariffs.

For a moment Mantin's face fell and his lips twisted a little to one side. Then he shrugged helplessly.

"That, of course," he said, "is something that I must chance. Business, after all, is a gamble with that sort of thing. But I'm pretty sure that Corinne will be the division point, and I'm not so certain

the U. P. will want to build south from its main line." He looked sharply at the Rio Kid. "Why do you ask, Captain?"

"Just curiosity, I reckon," the Rio Kid said, grinning. "I got to wonderin' what would happen to men like you if Brigham Young got his plans carried through."

Mantin laughed. "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. I'm not too worried about the problem. Well, I'll have to be getting along."

He smiled and walked on down the street. The Rio Kid watched him for a moment or two, then turned in the direction he had been heading. Celestino walked beside him, his dark face puzzled and his eyes thoughtful.

"General," he asked, "why we tell thees things to Senor Mantin?"

"Because," said the Rio Kid, as they started across the street, "we don't want to let go what we really know. If Mantin should happen to talk to the wrong people, do yuh think Tolliver would have that railroad money waitin' for us?"

Celestino thought that over. "That ees true. But why you ask heem about Senor Brigham?"

"Just checking up on some ideas I've been havin'," said the Rio Kid, "and also to keep him from askin' too many questions about the payroll robbery."

He entered his hotel and went up to his room. Old Jim Bridger slouched on a chair by the window and he looked around as the two men entered.

"I seen that guard we rode with yestiddy, the big beaver that threw his sixes on us," he announced at once.

"Bristow!" the Rio Kid exclaimed. "Where?"

Bridger's thin old lips parted in a grin. "He's workin' right peaceful down at the boat landin'."

"I reckon we'd better have a little talk with him, Jim," the Rio Kid said, and there was meaning in the way he hitched his gun-belt to a more comfortable position.

The old scout nodded silently and rose. He led the way from the hotel and strode easily along the crowded streets to the levees along the Bear. As the three men neared the river, the warehouses grew more numerous and big freighting wagons rumbled and creaked under their heavy loads.

It was the first time the Rio Kid had been down in this district, and he was amazed at the amount of business that flowed through the Corinne warehouses. He began to understand why it was so important that the traffic on the lake be continued.

If the Union Pacific ran a spur line south from Ogden, all this activity that moved and roared around him would be endangered.

There was a big freight boat tied up to one of the levees and its cargo came out in a never-ending stream. Tally men called the count and the merchandise flowed into the wide gaping doors of a big warehouse.

Jim Bridger circled the tally clerk and cut through the line of loaded stevedores.

Just beyond was another levee, the goods piled high out in the open. Evidently another lake boat had just unloaded and returned down the Bear toward the Great Salt Lake.

THE old scout held up his hand for caution and the Rio Kid and Celestino halted. Their eyes probed at the constantly moving stream of workers pouring in and out of another warehouse.

"Bristow's around here somewhar," Bridger said quietly. "I saw him, and a feller told me he worked here."

The Rio Kid's blue eyes became hard and cold as he nodded. His hand unconsciously stroked the handle of the Colt in his holster.

"This is one jasper that we're goin' to get alive," he promised. "And he's goin' to talk."

Celestino stiffened and nudged the Rio Kid. "General, there is Bristow! There, by the door."

The Rio Kid's eyes cut sharply toward the warehouse. Bristow had just come out, guns tied low around his waist. He had not seen the three men who waited for him. The Rio Kid loosened his Colts and started threading the crowd toward him.

Bristow seemed to get some instinctive warning, for he halted abruptly and his eyes darted through the crowd. In that moment, the Rio Kid stepped clear. Instantly, Bristow's lips drew back in a snarl and he dropped into a crouch. His hands blurred down and slapped leather.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *Colt Showdown*

URT BRISTOW'S unexpected move gave him a split second advantage. His gun was spitting before the Rio Kid's six had cleared leather. The slug sailed Bob Pryor's hat from his head and the second tugged viciously at his shirt sleeve.

Bristow fired fast, depending on speed rather than accuracy. The Rio Kid's guns lined down. He fired deliberately, his eyes squinted against the sun. Bristow's gun spun from his hand as a hot slug smashed his fingers. The gunman crouched lower, his left hand still bucking against the kick of the second six.

The Rio Kid weaved a little to one side and Bristow half-turned to keep his six on the shifting target. Pryor fired again and Bristow tumbled, his leg knocked out from under him. His gun flipped from his hand and landed a few feet away. The gunman grabbed for it, but the Rio Kid jumped forward, his boot kicking the weapon in a spinning arch out of reach.

Bristow stopped moving. He glared up at the Rio Kid. The crowd suddenly surged forward and the Rio Kid turned. Celestino's gun was out and Bridger carried his rifle so that it could go into instant action. Under the silent threat, men pushed back, uncertain.

"I'm the Law," the Rio Kid announced, his voice cold and clipped. "This man's under arrest for train robbery."

Celestino and Bridger helped Bristow to his feet and carried him to a buckboard that the Rio Kid commandeered in the name of the Law. In a few moments they were headed for Doc Truman's, Bristow's face set tight in anger and pain. The man said nothing during the short ride.

The Rio Kid stood to one side while Doc Truman splinted Bristow's broken fingers and probed for the slug in his leg. The gunman's face was wet with a cold sweat and he bit his lips against the pain. At last, it was over and Bristow lay on the table, his chest heaving.

The Rio Kid looked at Doc Truman. "Can I question him?"

The young doctor nodded. "In a minute. He's not seriously hurt. It's just the pain right now, and that'll pass."

The Rio Kid waited until the renegade's breathing became normal, and the gunhawk glared at him. The Rio Kid pulled up a chair.

"Bristow," he said, "yuh can figger on twenty years in jail and yuh might stretch a hemp rope for murder. There was a man killed when yore bunch held up that pay train."

"Mebbe, lawdog," Bristow sneered. "I reckon I'll get out of it."

The Rio Kid studied the pinched, mean face before him. He weighed the man's character and took a chance on striking at a weak point. He shook his head.

"Yuh don't savvy yet, Bristow. Tolliver and his boss ain't backin' yuh. How do yuh reckon we knew exactly where to pick yuh up?"

Bristow's eyes narrowed. They probed at the Rio Kid, who sat silent and blank-faced. Bristow licked his lips.

"Yuh mean Todd Tolliver put yuh on my trail?" he asked.

"I'm not sayin' Tolliver did." The Rio Kid shrugged. "Him and me don't get along. But I do have a law badge and sometimes that comes in right handy to a man like Tolliver."

Bristow's eyes narrowed. "He sent one of his sidewinders to yuh?"

The Rio Kid shrugged and his lips tightened as though he was determined to give no more information. Bristow's face clouded, and his eyes gleamed angrily.

"I'm shore glad I ain't one of that crowd," he blurted. "Tolliver'd shoot his own grandma if there was a dollar in it for him—like he got rid of Major Fitzhugh."

THE Rio Kid fought to keep the look of triumph out of his face. He shook his head.

"Yuh still don't savvy, Bristow. Who does Todd take orders from? Think he'd throw yuh over if the man behind him didn't mark the tally?"

Bristow shook his head. "No, the boss ain't the man to throw me over. It's that sneakin' Tolliver. He's been figgerin' to take the boss' place. It's him. Listen,

lawdog—I'll give yuh plenty to put Tolliver right where he belongs. He killed Major Fitzhugh to get his pardner's *dinero* and warehouses. I was with Black Judkins when he done that job. The major's buried under the floor of that little cabin at the north tip of the lake."

The Rio Kid's hands balled into fists but he allowed no emotion to show in his face.

"How about the railroad payroll?" he asked.

"Tolliver's got it," Bristow said, and laughed sourly. "I was just to keep you and yore friends from stoppin' the play. Todd's men rode north for about ten miles, then cut back to Corinne. The *dinero's* probably in his safe right now."

The Rio Kid nodded and arose. He looked down at Bristow.

"Yuh still think yore boss didn't order Tolliver to get yuh out of the way?"

Bristow grinned up at Pryor. "No yuh don't, lawman. I'd like to see Todd Tolliver hang, but I ain't bein' tricked into tellin' yuh who my boss is. If yuh want to know, yuh'll have to find out for yoreself."

"I already know," the Rio Kid said, and shrugged. "Dan Ryan's here to put yuh in jail. Yore boss'll be with yuh by nightfall."

Bob Pryor opened the door to the outer office. Dan Ryan waited and the Rio Kid quickly sketched what Bristow had told him.

"Get him in the calaboose," he said, "and I reckon we don't have to wait any longer, Dan. Unlimber yore sixes for a clean-up job."

"I reckon Bristow won't be moving," Ryan chuckled. "Let's start our roundup now."

The Rio Kid grinned and turned to Celestino and Bridger. "I reckon this is it," he told them. "I want you two to cover the back of the U. P. Saloon. Me and Dan'll go in the front way. Probably there'll be a lot of Tolliver's gunnies there and they're goin' to throw lead considerable. Be shore yuh hit what yuh shoot at."

He turned and called Doc Truman over.

"Doc," he said, "I reckon that renegade can stay hitched right here. Yuh'd better bring Mary up here and keep an eye on her until we get this thing cleaned up."

Celestino nodded and grinned. He didn't look much good as a fighter with his right arm still in a sling, but the Rio Kid knew him to be lightning fast with his left—fast and accurate.

The young Mexican's eyes danced. "My General, thees hombres they go to jail, no?"

"Yes, if yuh can put 'em there."

"Me, I do heem," Celestino said proudly. "You watch, General."

Bridger grunted and turned away, but his faded old eyes gleamed with the prospect of excitement. The Rio Kid gave them time to circle the U. P. Saloon, then he and Dan Ryan left the doctor's office. They strode side by side, their faces grim, arms swinging, their hands close to the Colts that nestled at their sides.

They marched directly to the tent saloon. As usual the place was crowded and the two lawmen had to shove themselves through the door. The bar was three deep even at this time of the day and the Rio Kid caught himself wondering why Todd Tolliver hadn't been content with the money a legal business would bring to him.

"He ain't in sight," Ryan's low voice cut into his thoughts. "Prob'bly back in his office."

The Rio Kid nodded and swung away toward the game room. He spotted Celestino and Bridger on the far side of the tent. They kept themselves in position to guard the backs of the two lawmen.

AS THEY entered the next room a man jumped up from a far table, his face drawn. He started to cut toward Tolliver's office. With a smooth draw, Ryan's gun covered him.

"Stand hitched, me bucko," he growled. "Shure and we can make our own calls on friend Tolliver."

The Rio Kid chuckled. "That's our first arrest, Dan. I reckon yuh'll find a wanted dodger for him somewheres."

Ryan nodded and rolled forward. A deadly silence fell on the room and men twisted around from the tables to watch. The marshal shucked the man's hardware and stepped back. His move was so swift the gunhawk who tried to get him had no time to dodge. The gunny crumpled under the blow of the marshal's gun butt.

Dan Ryan looked down. "He'll stand

hitched a while with nothin' more'n a headache later."

The Rio Kid cut toward Tolliver's office. He was but a few feet away when Tolliver came around the canvas fly that formed the door. His sallow face looked startled when he saw the Rio Kid, but he quickly recovered.

"What yuh want?" he demanded.

The Rio Kid didn't draw his gun. He stood spread-legged, his hands on his hips, his eyes level.

"You," he said shortly. "For robbery and murder."

Todd Tolliver did not change expression. His eyes shifted around the room as though hunting something, and then he seemed more at ease. There was a slight smile around his tight mouth when he again faced the Rio Kid.

"What did I rob and who did I murder?" he drawled.

"Yore men robbed the Union Pacific pay train and you murdered Major Fitzhugh," the Rio Kid said levelly.

Tolliver's brows arched up. "That's a mighty black tally. Can yuh prove it?"

The Rio Kid felt the tension mount. Ryan stood to one side. Celestino and Jim Bridger were somewhere across the tent behind him. But the room was filled with Todd's gunmen and that explained his careless ease. Todd Tolliver himself was dangerous and the Rio Kid did not dare take his eyes from the man. It was up to Ryan, Celestino and Bridger to stop the gunhawks.

Bob Pryor took a half step forward, his muscles tensed.

"I can, Tolliver," he said thunderously. "The *dinero* from the pay train's in yore safe. Major Fitzhugh's body is buried under the cabin where I killed Black Judkins. Do yuh come peaceful?"

For an eternal minute the silence in the tent was heavy and oppressive. The Rio Kid saw Tolliver's eyes widen in stunned fear when the Rio Kid made his accusation. And Pryor knew then that Bristow had not lied. Then Tolliver's shallow, black eyes narrowed and he shrugged. "Yuh got more nerve than sense, Rio Kid," he said slowly. "My men can blast yuh down at a word from me. They're behind yuh."

The Rio Kid shook his head. "That's whatever. I got some fair gunsmoke artists with me. I'm takin' yuh in, Tolliver."

The tall, thin man made no move toward the gun that hung from a belt under his coat, but he shifted nervously. His fingers made a little signal and he plunged toward the cover of the tent fly. Instantly, the Rio Kid's hand darted to his holster.

A six roared behind him and the slug nicked his shoulder. It threw him off balance and he stumbled. He fell forward, catching himself with his extended arm. He heard the whine of another bullet as it cut the air.

INSTANTLY the tent was filled with the blasting roar of spitting Colts. The Rio Kid crouched close to the floor, twisted back toward the men in the room. Celestino, Ryan and Bridger had gone into action.

Through the haze of gunsmoke, shot through with tongues of spitting orange flame, the Rio Kid saw that Tolliver's gunhawks had shifted their attention from him. Already four of them were down. Ryan and Celestino fired with

*(Turn page)*


# Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

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(Adv.)

deadly precision and Jim Bridger had abandoned his rifle. He snaked forward, a shining skinning knife in his fist, his old lips drawn back and his eyes blazing.

The Rio Kid ran at a crouch after Todd Tolliver. He plunged into the office. He saw that the safe door was closed and his eyes darted around the room. He saw a long slit where Tolliver had cut the canvas and slipped outside. Instantly the Rio Kid jumped across the room and pushed himself through the cut. He found himself in a long alley behind the main street of Corinne. Tolliver's lanky figure was streaking away, and the Rio Kid placed a quick warning shot. Instantly, Tolliver dodged and cut to the shelter of a building.

The Rio Kid ran forward. He could not let Tolliver escape to the street where the crowd would hamper pursuit!

## CHAPTER XX

### *The King Is Dead*

GLEAM of metal warned the Rio Kid just in time. He dropped as Todd Tolliver's gun blasted toward him, and rolled toward the shelter of a big cask a few feet away. Tolliver's bullets kicked up the dust in front of his face and tugged sharply at his boot heel.

The Rio Kid made the cask. He heard a shot thud into the wood, then came the gurgle of water escaping.

Crouching, the Rio Kid peered around the edge of the cask. From behind him, in the direction of the saloon, came the continued sound of firing, but it was more sporadic now. That worried the Rio Kid. His friends might be in serious trouble facing those gunhawks.

He jerked his head back as a whining slug cut a long splinter from the wood and continued its death song down the alley. The Rio Kid fired twice toward the corner. Evidently Todd Tolliver was making a stand. That puzzled the Rio Kid, for it was not like the man.

He took another quick look, then knew the gun boss was cornered. He had ducked around the corner of a building that formed a solid U with the store next to it. There was no way Tolliver could cut over to the street. The man had to fight or surrender.

The Rio Kid studied his position and then his keen searching eyes darted across the alley. If he could get over there, he would force Tolliver to step clear of the building to take a shot at him. The Rio Kid gathered his powerful legs under him. He fired again at Tolliver's hiding place, keeping the man from peering around the edge of the building.

Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, jumped from behind the cask. His long legs carried him across the few yards of dusty alley to the other side. Tolliver got in one wild shot that did not come near its mark. The Rio Kid's lips set in a grim fighting line and he hugged the walls as he edged forward.

This would be the showdown. Either Tolliver stepped clear or waited until the Rio Kid was upon him. Gun held poised, ready to chop down instantly, the Rio Kid cautiously edged toward the renegade's hiding place. He stiffened suddenly, as he heard the crash of breaking glass.

Instantly he wheeled and threw his shoulder against a closed door beside him. It crashed open and the Rio Kid raced through a barber shop toward the street. Tolliver had broken a window and had slipped out of the U trap. The barber gasped, razor held in mid-air. Two men jumped to the protection of chairs when they saw the gun in the Rio Kid's hand.

He burst through the street door, halted and whirled. Todd Tolliver drew up short just a few feet away. The gun boss had evidently planned to cut back to the protection of his gang at the U. P. Saloon. Now, surprise and deathly fear were mirrored in his eyes.

The crowd on the sidewalk quickly pushed aside, forming two hushed rows outside the line of possible flying bullets. Both Tolliver and the Rio Kid held their guns at their side, for neither had expected to meet the other so quickly.

"This is it, Todd," the Rio Kid called, his eyes steady. "Comin' peaceful, or shootin' it out?"

Tolliver's eyes shifted. Abruptly a look of hopelessness came to his face and he shrugged his thin shoulders.

"I reckon yuh got me in a tight, Pryor."

The Rio Kid nodded and took a half step forward. Instantly Tolliver's gun snapped up. The Rio Kid threw himself desperately to one side, throwing his own gun up into line. Tolliver's six mushroomed flame and smoke. The slug cut a long gash on the Rio Kid's arm.

BOB PRYOR'S gun bucked back in his fist. Through the billowing smoke, he saw Todd throw his arms wide and fall back. The smoke cleared and Tolliver lay in the dust on his back, a red stain spreading on the right side of his shirt. His eyes glazed.

Quickly holstering his gun, the Rio Kid bent down, disregarding the warm trickle of blood along his arm. Tolliver looked at him and his thin lips moved faintly.

"Yuh've—taken all the cards," he mumbled, his voice a fading whisper. "I killed my brother-in-law, Major Fitzhugh—for his property—and money. I—got protection—thing never proved. I—" He made a quick gesture with his hand. "Give—everything—to Mary Fitzhugh. It's—hers."

His head lolled to one side and he died. The Rio Kid looked up at the circle of close-pressing faces. His eyes centered on the barber.

"Yuh heard that?" he asked. "Yuh'll be witness?"

The man nodded, numbly. Abruptly the crowd parted and Dan Ryan limped through. He had a makeshift bandage around the fleshy part of his arm. Celestino limped after him, blood staining his trousers.

"Glory be," Ryan said, as he pulled up short, "and it's the imp himself ye've downed."

The Rio Kid arose and nodded. "Yes, and he confessed to the murder of Major Fitzhugh. I've got a witness." He pulled forward the barber who babbled confirmation.

"We done some salivatin' back at the U. P. and them gunnies shure faded fast," Ryan said, with a broad grin. "I found the train payroll in Todd's safe. Bedad, and this has been a busy day!"

The Rio Kid wiped the blood from the scratch along his face and flexed his arm. The muscles had not stiffened.

"It's not over, Dan," he said soberly. "You round up Tolliver's boys and the railroad *dinero*. Me'n Celestino is goin' after the man behind all this. I'll see yuh at the jail in half an hour."

He jerked his head in a signal to the young Mexican and shoved through the crowd, leaving the marshal to gape after him in stunned surprise. They walked quickly to the next corner and turned toward the Union Pacific offices.

"How about Bridger?" the Rio Kid asked, without breaking his stride.

Celestino shrugged. "Senor Bridger, he ees very sad. He theenk maybe he not young like once. He cut only four men back een the saloon."

The Rio Kid chuckled and went on. They pushed through the doors of the Union Pacific building and the clerks in the main office stared at their bloody, dusty figures. The Rio Kid's face was grim as he crossed to General Dodge's door and pushed in.

Dodge swung around, and Claude Mantin looked up. For an instant there was a flash of fear across the man's face, but it quickly erased. Dodge's keen glance grew alarmed as he saw the wounds the Rio Kid and Celestino sported.

"You're hurt!" he exclaimed, as he rose from his chair.

The Rio Kid came slowly toward the desk and halted a few paces away. His keen eyes commanded both men.

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"We been cleanin' up skunks," he said. "General, Dan Ryan'll bring yore payroll in here pretty soon. Todd Tolliver is dead, and he confessed to the murder of Major Fitzhugh and to robbin' the train. Dan's roundin' up Todd's gunnies that ain't left town."

DODGE'S face showed a swift procession of emotions. Finally he sank down in his chair and blew out his breath.

"Captain Pryor, you work fast!" he said admiringly. "It looks as if Corinne is cleaned up."

The Rio Kid shook his head. "Just one more job," he said. "The mysterious jasper who has been backin' Todd, the big businessman you and Brigham Young both wanted to know about."

Dodge laughed. "I reckon that can be worked out."

"No," the Rio Kid answered. "It's already done. I'm just callin' him for a showdown."

Dodge leaned forward. "You know who he is?"

"Yes." The Rio Kid's smile was cold. "I arrested a gent by the name of Bristow this mornin'. He's the fake guard that turned his guns on us in the train robbery. He carried a forged pass signed by you."

Mantin looked astounded. "But, Pryor, how could he?"

The Rio Kid half turned and his hand hovered close to his gun.

"Claude Mantin, yuh're goin' to explain that to a judge and jury. Yuh're the only one who knew we was ridin' to Ogden to guard the pay train. It's yore lake boats that reaps all the profit from the Utah settlements to the south and yuh're the one who, under cover, has been fightin' the division point at Ogden."

Mantin jumped to his feet and the Rio Kid tensed. Mantin's face worked.

"You're lying!" he flung at Pryor.

"Not me." The Rio Kid shook his head. "I just told yuh I'd picked up Bristow. I had to shoot Tolliver and he talked before he died."

Mantin's face went white. Suddenly his hand darted inside his coat. It came out flashing a small hide-out gun. The Rio Kid's gun barely cleared the holster, tipped up and blasted. Mantin fired, but the deadly bullet only scored the floor. He stood swaying a moment, then collapsed.

Dodge jumped up and ran to him. Mantin coughed and choked over his words.

"And—I had everything—planned. I'd —have been—King of Utah!"

His eyes glazed and he fell back. The door burst open and the clerks from the outer office rushed in. Dodge shoved them out again, asking one to get the company doctor. He turned back, a look of wonder and admiration in his eyes.

"How did you unmask him, Pryor?" he demanded.

The Rio Kid slipped a fresh shell in the chamber and grinned wearily at General Dodge.

"I just guessed," he confessed, "and let Mantin tell me hisself. Bristow hadn't talked, but I was dead shore he was Mantin's man. Todd Tolliver talked plenty, but not about Mantin." The Rio Kid gestured toward the body on the floor. "He didn't know that, and his guilt betrayed him. I run a bluff that wouldn't have worked if Mantin had bluffed right back.

"Brigham Young, in Salt Lake City, gave me the clue to his identity. From what he said I knew the hombre we was lookin' for controlled the lake boats. He had to be close to and unsuspected by you or some other high official of the U. P. He had to be powerful from the money end, and had a heap of business interests. All that fit Mantin like a rope around a dogie's neck.

"I reckon, General, if yuh examine some land records made recent, yuh'll find that Tolliver transferred a lot of titles to Mantin. Todd had a bad reputation and was a plumb good front for any shady deal Mantin wanted to put through."

Dodge paced to the window, thinking deeply. He turned when the doctor entered. It didn't take the sawbones but a minute to declare Mantin dead. Then, on Dodge's order, he patched up the Rio Kid's wounds.

GENERAL DODGE cornered the Rio Kid when the doctor turned to Celestino. The General put out his hand.

"Pryor," he said, "the Union Pacific owes you more than it can pay. I could get you a good job on the railroad. It'll

need the services of a tiptop troubleshooter for years to come."

The Rio Kid shook his head. "Thanks, General, but I reckon I don't want to be tied down to any one brand. I'll be moseyin' along. I hear there's a ruckus over in New Mexico that's stirrin' up a heap of trouble."

Dodge sighed and returned to his desk. "But what about Mary Fitzhugh?" he asked.

The Rio Kid frowned, and then his attention centered on the street. His frown changed to a grin and he motioned General Dodge to the window. He pointed. "There's yore naswer," he murmured, "and I reckon I'm the hombre that brought 'em together."

Dodge saw Mary Fitzhugh walking along on the arm of young Dr. Truman. She was free now to walk the streets of Corinne without fear of an assassin's bullet. She smiled up into the young doctor's face and she looked happy.

The Rio Kid sighed and turned away. "Nobody needs me now in Corinne, General," he said. "The West is big and there's a heap of meanness in it. I want to help make the West a decent, civilized place where men can live—free and easy-like."

Dodge smiled. "Make it God's country?"

The Rio Kid's brows arched questioningly, then he grinned.

"Mebbe that's it. I reckon it'll take a heap of doin' and I'm late already . . . Celestino, ready to ride?"

Celestino stood up, his teeth flashing in a wide smile.

"*Si*, my General. More troubles, no?"

The Rio Kid shrugged. "*Quien sabe?* We'll just foller Saber's nose. *Adios*, General."

He softly closed the door behind him and Dodge sat staring at the blank panels for a long time. There was a look of envy in his eyes. At last he sighed and returned to the pile of work still on his desk.

●

FURTHER EXPLOITS OF CAPTAIN BOB PRYOR AND HIS PARDS

IN

# INDIAN OUTPOST

## By TOM CURRY

NEXT ISSUE'S COMPLETE FRONTIER ACTION NOVEL

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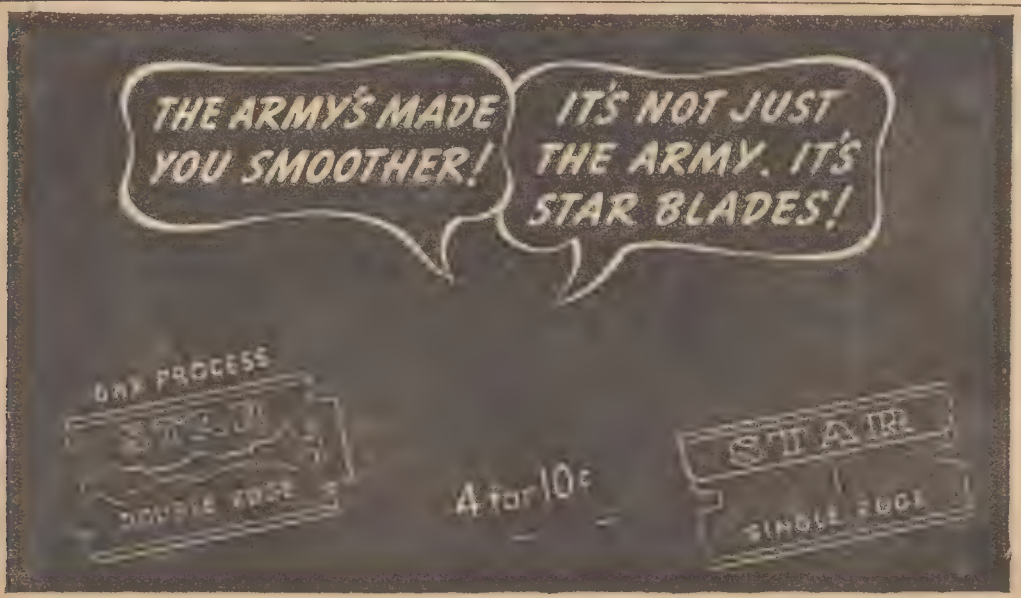


# Turkey Buzzard

## By JOHN EASTERLY

*A western younker meets an owlhooter's challenge!*

BUD stood solidly in the doorway and pointed his .22 rifle squarely at the man's pot-bellied midriff. Bud was only twelve years old, but he was the man of the family. Pa and his brother Tom were away on that big cattle drive, and it was up to Bud to protect Ma and his sister, Mary.

Mary was all of sixteen, but she was only a girl. This big, scowling, stubble-bearded fellow with the tobacco-stained teeth already had Mary in a trembling, cowed state of terror. Ma now, would have stood up to the intruder, but Ma was sick and couldn't get out of bed. All she could do was to lie there, helpless to drive the man out. So it was up to Bud.

"She's cocked and loaded, Mister," Bud said grimly, "and I can shoot straight and fast enough to beat yore draw. Unbuckle yore belt and shuck them six-shooters yuh're a-wearin'."

HAWK MITCHELL

The hulking intruder twisted his head and glared at the boy on the threshold. He guffawed at sight of the barefooted lad and the puny, rusted old single-shot .22 rifle. But his black eyes slitted and his huge hands curled and worked spasmodically.

"Put down that popgun, kid," he ordered in a throaty snarl, "and come here 'fore I break yore neck."

"Unbuckle them six-guns," repeated Bud stonily. "Mary, you sidle over and snake 'em away when he drops 'em."

"And s'posin' I don't drop 'em?" growled the intruder.

"Then I'll drop you," Bud said firmly.

"No!" cried Ma from the bed, holding out one thin, fever-wasted hand in supplication. "Oh, Buddy, don't! We have to do like he says. All he wants is food and a change of hosses. Oh, don't hurt my boy, please! He don't understand."

It was Ma who didn't understand. But how could she? She had been sick since before this ugly drifter came into the lives of the Camerons. Bud knew all about it. This fellow's name was "Hawk" Mitchell and he belonged on the owlhoot trail. He had ridden a few days for the Circle C until Pa caught onto him and fired him. Bud had heard Pa and Tom talking about it before they went away.

Now Mitchell had sneaked back to rob the womenfolks while the men were away. But he had reckoned without Bud. The last thing Pa had said before riding away was for Bud to take care of Ma and Mary. And Tom had grinned and reminded Bud of his rifle.

Tom had given Bud that gun on his tenth birthday. It had quite a history. It hadn't been a new gun when Tom picked it up, of course, but it made a fine weapon for a ten-year-old boy to learn to shoot with. The first week he had it Tom had taken him hunting, and they had shot a turkey buzzard over on Wildcat Mesa and hung the ugly, ungainly bird by his neck in the fork of a scrub oak tree. So excited was he over the game that Bud had forgotten about his

rifle and left it there in the brush on the hilltop.

IT WAS three days before they found it again, and it was so rusted that the cartridge Tom fired through to clean it wouldn't go and hung up in the barrel. That ruined the gun. Tom was sorry about it and promised to take it over to the locksmith at Long Bow to see if he could fix it, but he had never seemed to get around to it.

Pa had just snorted and said it was a poor gun for a rancher's boy to cut his teeth on, anyhow, and just wait a few years and he'd give Bud a real six-shooter to practice with.

But Bud had not wanted to be deprived of a gun so quickly. He had tried to figure out how to repair the weapon himself. He had tried measuring with a ramrod to find just where the bullet was stuck and, having located it, he had tried to melt the leaden pellet out by heating the gun barrel. But he hadn't been able to get the gun hot enough to melt out the lead. Finally he'd had another idea.

If the rust and fouled powder that stopped the bullet were not too thick, he might fire another bullet through the gun, and it might push the lodged bullet out ahead of it. Of course, there was the danger of exploding the gun barrel and killing himself.

Bud got around this by putting the rifle in the vise in the tool shed and tying a long string to the trigger. Inserting a fresh cartridge, he stood back and pulled the string. The hammer fell, and the gun fired with a queer sort of muffled report. But it had worked. And Bud had a usable .22 rifle again, which he set about cleaning and oiling.

That had been two years ago. It had been nearly a year now since Bud had had this old rifle in his hands. As soon as he'd heard Hawk Mitchell in here threatening Ma and Mary, he had sneaked up to the attic and got the old gun.

He'd had trouble finding cartridges for it, too, but he found three shells in the old muslin game sack that Ma had made for him to carry rabbits in. One would be enough, so he loaded the old gun and put the two spare shells in his overalls pocket. Now he faced Hawk Mitchell in his mother's bedroom at a distance of ten feet—plenty close enough to kill a skunk if he had to.

The words of Ma Cameron must have given Mitchell encouragement, for he licked his lips calculatingly and estimated the distance between him and Bud as his right hand instinctively crooked closer to his gun butt.

"Don't yuh do it!" Bud warned quickly. "You just shuck yore gun-belt."

But Mitchell only grinned. Then he made a lightninglike move, reaching out to grab Mary Cameron's wrist and jerk her slim body in front of him as a shield. At the same instant he drew his right-hand gun.

Bud didn't hesitate. Pa and Tom had said before it was a wonder that old gun hadn't blown up. This time Bud was sure it would, and scatter him to Kingdom Come. But he had to take a chance. It was his only weapon, his only hope of protecting Ma and Mary. His right forefinger tightened smoothly on the trigger of his .22 rifle. There was a faint pop of the exploding cap. And that was all. Neither report, nor bullet, nor smoke came from the rifle. As it had two years ago, the gun failed to fire.

Ma screamed as the big black six-shooter leaped from its holster on the man's thigh. Mary cried out in pain as she was yanked against the outlaw's stomach. But Bud made no sound. His face went white as he realized what had happened, but he was a man, wasn't he? He wasn't going to cry or to run. He had tried to protect his mother and his sister, and he had failed. Men didn't live long in this country when they failed. He could die like a man, anyway.

But Hawk Mitchell didn't fire his six-shooter.

"Drop that pea-shooter, button!" he snarled, menacing Bud with his revolver. "Yuh little fool—tryin' to bluff a man with an unloaded popgun!"

Slowly Bud lowered the muzzle of his treacherous little rifle. He blinked back the tears.

"Here, lemme see that gun," snapped Mitchell.

Releasing Mary, he strode forward and snatched the rifle from the boy's hands. He cocked the trigger and saw the cap end of a fired shell, and his ugly eyes bulged. Holstering his six-shooter, he pinched out the spent shell with dirty fingernails of forefinger and thumb. A

wisp of sulphurous smoke followed.

Mitchell sniffed at the barrel, then tried to squint through it.

"Yuh little devil!" he growled. "So yuh did try to shoot me, eh? And the popgun clogged up on yuh!"

HE HURLED the gun toward a corner and roared with laughter as he fetched Bud a back-handed wallop that knocked the boy head over heels after the useless weapon. He drew one of his guns again.

"I'm goin' to put holes through both yore ears for that," he snarled.

"Run, Bud!" cried Mary courageously, hurling herself against the man and clawing at his gunhand. "Get away from him!"

Ma screamed again in stark fear. It was awful.

The tears blinding him—tears of rage and shame and mortification, mind you; not tears of cowardice—Bud grabbed up his .22 rifle and scrambled like a scared rabbit for the gallery which ran along the back of the house. As he ran, he fumbled in his pocket and fished out another .22 shell which he rammed into the chamber of his faulty and traitorous gun.

A shot blasted out behind him, and he felt the wind of the bullet's passing. Hawk Mitchell was roaring aloud in rage now as he charged after the fleeing boy.

Funny how time and everything seemed suddenly to stand still.

Just as clearly as though he were taking a leisurely survey of things on Sunday morning after having done his chores around the house, Bud saw the wash basin on the porch shelf, with the towel hanging from the nail beside it. Tom's Sunday saddle was pegged to the wall by one stirrup.

Chickens were scratching and clucking in the yard as calmly as though a man were not fleeing for his life twenty feet away. The well that Pa and Tom had dug at the side of the kitchen was there, still naked of top and awaiting a roof that Pa was going to build over it. The pair of Y-shaped posts awaiting the windlass which had been already planted by Tom stood there above the well like people with their arms upraised in supplication, just like Ma had looked a minute ago.

Bud darted along the gallery toward the well, made the turn at the corner of the house just as Mitchell came stamping out onto the gallery. Another blast from his six-shooters, and he started lumbering after the sobbing, fleeing lad. As he reached the end of the porch above the well he caught sight of the boy and raised his guns.

Bud was standing by the big sycamore tree in the side yard. He knew he couldn't outrun a bullet across the bare expanse beyond.

So he stood there with his useless rifle raised and pointed back at the murderous outlaw on the porch.

"Drop them guns, Hawk Mitchell!" Bud shrilled defiantly. "I'm warnin' yuh!"

Hawk Mitchell's answer was to fire a shot. The bullet kicked up dust at Bud's feet.

But Bud never blinked or flinched. Calmly he squeezed his own trigger.

There was a queer sort of muffled roar, and Mitchell let out a strangled yell as a pair of .22 slugs burned into his shoulder. He staggered around, tripped, lost his balance, and lunged outward toward the well.

But he didn't fall into the twenty-foot hole. His head slipped squarely over the Y-shaped fork of the nearer windlass upright and lodged there firmly. There was a sickening crack as the weight of his falling body broke his neck. And he dangled there convulsively for a moment before becoming still.

A RATAPLAN of hoofs sounded in Bud's ears, and he looked around to find the sheriff of Long Bow galloping up to the house.

"Hi, Bud!" yelled the sheriff. "What's goin' on here twixt you and that Mitchell feller I'm a-chasin'?"

"Nothin' much, Sheriff," said Bud, trying not to tremble. "I just shot me an outlaw who was pesterin' Ma and Mary."

The sheriff examined the corpse of Hawk Mitchell and pursed his lips in a long whistle of comprehension.

"Yuh shore did, young feller," he said then, "and hung him up in the best turkey buzzard style. Seems like the littlest Cameron has gone and turned man."

Shucks, that was a silly thing to say. Bud already knew that.

# THE BUNKHOUSE

*(Continued from page 11)*

how to make Curley Bill his friend.

The tax collecting trip was not the last time Billy Breakenridge was to call upon Curley Bill for help. A man named Gage, living at Contention, a little town in the country, had a fine race horse stolen from him by the Clanton-McLowery gang, of which, at the time, Curley Bill was the executive officer. Deputy Breakenridge decided to ride out to their camp and make a diplomatic attempt at recovering the horse for Gage.

### *A Brave Act*

It takes a brave man to ride into the camp of a gang of outlaws alone, and especially if the gang has just committed a crime and is expecting the law, but Breakenridge rode boldly into their camp and took the matter up with Curley Bill. No doubt the Deputy once more played upon Bill's vanity, probably told him that if he would say the word that all Breakenridge would have to do would be to ride the horse away, he also probably hinted that no other man's word would have half as much power with the outlaws as would Bill's. Anyway Bill called a short business meeting at which the Clantons and McLowerys were present.

After the adjournment of the meeting Bill came to Breakenridge and told him to make himself perfectly at home, eat with them, sleep with them and in the morning he would find the horse in question tied to the hitch rack in front of the house, but while he would guarantee the presence of the horse there as stated, he would not guarantee just how long Breakenridge would retain possession of him as the gang declared their intention of riding after him when he departed, and retaking the horse.

Breakenridge ate his supper with the men, slept in the same room with them, shared breakfast with them and, sure enough, when he looked for the horse, he found him just as Curley Bill had told him he would.

Breakenridge could sense the tension. He was sure that Bill was the only friend he had in the gang, and he knew also that the power over a gang by its leader also has its limits. He was not at all sure that the men would allow him to leave there with the horse, but he had gone too far to back out now and so decided that the quicker he got away the better it would be for him.

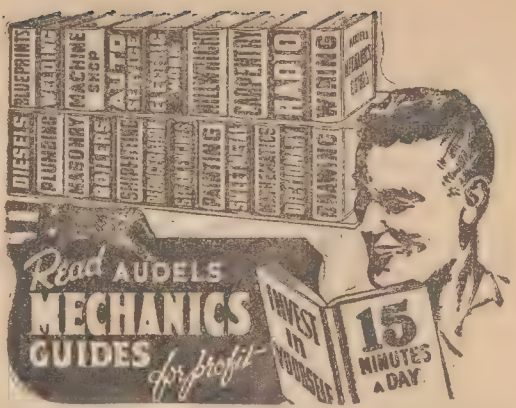
### *Billy's Wild Ride*

He made preparations for his departure by saddling the horse which he had ridden out from town and then mounting, he headed for Tombstone, leading the race horse.

He had no sooner cleared the gate on his homebound trip than he saw the Clantons and the McLowerys mount their horses, which were already saddled and ready, and ride out toward the foothills and then turn in the same direction in which he was going.

Sizing up the situation, which called for some fast thinking if he was to save his hide, he saw an emigrant wagon traveling in his direction so he rode up alongside of it, and keeping it between himself and the outlaw

[*Turn page*]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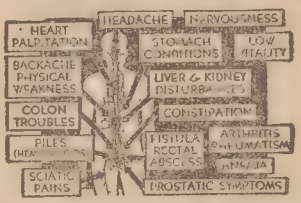


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gang, he dropped to the ground, and keeping the horses moving, he changed his saddle from his own horse to the back of the race horse.

After giving the saddle horse to the emigrant with a request to take him into Tombstone and turn him over to the livery stable, he mounted the race horse and started for town at a dead run.

Paul Revere's ride of Revolutionary days was probably not nearly so wild as the ride Billy Breakenridge made that day.

The gang tried to overtake him, but he had by far the fastest mount; they tried to bring him down with their six-shooter fire, but he was out of range and pulling away with each moment. The dust kicked up by the leaden missiles from the guns of the outlaws seemed to give his horse greater speed, and in a short time he was entirely out of range and could breathe easier.

### *Admits He Was Scared*

Men like Billy Breakenridge, who played a prominent part in winning the West to law and order, are not of the bragging type. It's hard to get Uncle Billy, as most of the folks who know him, call him, to talk of the things that occurred, in which he took a prominent part.

The grand old man, who is still alive, will talk for hours about the brave deeds of his fellow lawmen, but when one of his own deeds is brought into the conversation he will talk little or pass over his part of any courageous undertaking lightly, but he will frankly admit that on such occasions as the regaining of the race horse, and that wild ride with bullets kicking up the dust all about him, he was scared, and Uncle Billy says that in a pinch like that it is time for a man to be scared and that it helps his speed, helps him to think out any possible way to escape.

### *Another Great Lawman*

Billy Breakenridge has a great friend, another oldtime lawmen who lives now just outside of El Paso, Jeff Milton. He was one of the first of the Border Patrol, a great lawman and one that was not afraid to go up against the hot lead of outlaws when it was necessary.

It has been forty-three years this past February since an attempted holdup of an El Paso and Southwestern passenger train of which Jeff Milton was the shotgun messenger.

The gang was composed of John Patterson, "Three Fingered Jack," Bob Brown, and two Owens Brothers. They were a well-known and desperate gang, but with a man like a Jeff Milton in the express car and with a sawed-off shotgun there was not much chance of the holdup being a financial success for the outlaws.

### *He Never Quit*

Milton was shot in the arm by a large caliber bullet and it was found necessary, later, to remove about four inches of shattered bone from his arm just above the elbow, but he never quit.

He was a Wells-Fargo shotgun messenger with plenty of Wells-Fargo buckshot just waiting to be presented to outlaws attempting to rob the express cars of the company. He used his shotgun with such good intent that Three Fingered Jack received a mortal

wound, and his companions loaded him onto a horse and carried him as far as they could, but were forced to abandon him at a nearby ranch where he was found by a sheriff's posse. He was taken to Tombstone but died shortly after arrival there.

It must be a great pleasure to Billy Breakenridge and Jeff Milton to look over that section of the Southwest that was so wild, so lawless, and to know that they helped to win it to civilization, to law and order.

They are two of the oldest lawmen of that wild era that are still living in that section. There were three of them, Lorenzo Walters was the other, but he passed on to the last roundup this past spring leaving two grand men and two great friends of his to continue for a time to enjoy the fruits of peace and prosperity, the thing they fought for and risked their lives for when the West was young. *Adios.*

—FOGHORN CLANCY.

*OUR NEXT ISSUE*

WINTER had set in over all of the Wyoming wilderness in the year 1866 and there was danger in the frosty air. The Sioux were out and these were their hereditary winter stamping grounds. To the west were their beloved Big Horn Mountains, their summits now white with snow against the leaden sky.

Here was the Bozeman Trail, the cut-off which led northwest to the Montana gold fields. Not far away was Fort Phil Kearney, one of the new outposts set up to protect the trail from the infuriated Sioux.

The Indians, refusing to knuckle under to the whites, had been on the warpath for years. The new trail cut their lands in half—the buffalo and antelope were being slaughtered, animals which gave them food, cloth-

[*Turn page*]

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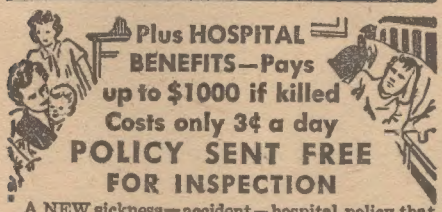

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A wagon train was headed for Fort Kearney, and with it rode a young Eastern school teacher who was to marry a young officer at the post, escorted by a sergeant and a few men who were bringing her to the fort in an Army ambulance.

At the fort Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, was acting as a scout and he rode with the soldiers when they learned that the wagon train had been attacked by the Indians, and rode to the rescue.

This is the colorful setting of INDIAN OUTPOST, by Tom Curry, the exciting Rio Kid novel in the next issue.

Suspense mounts as black-hearted Jerome "Flash" Davis deals with Chief Red Cloud, the most powerful leader of the biggest tribe. For Davis was an important cog in the machine which kept the Indians of the Frontier supplied with rifles of the newest type, ammunition, whisky and trinkets.

The Indians attack the post—and the battle is a grim one, and of course the Rio Kid and his Mexican pardner, Celestino Mireles, are in the thick of the fray. Here is a little taste of one of the action scenes:

It wasn't long until the Rio Kid was back, close to the clearing in which stood the black bulk of Fort Phil Kearney. He headed for the south gate, meaning to signal the sentry always on guard, as at all the danger points.

"Blazes, the gate's open!" he growled.

On his left, he suddenly sighted creeping, dark figures on the snow.

For a moment he didn't understand; he sang out, close to the open gate: "Watch it—the Sioux're comin'!"

His shoulder hit the gate. There were men just inside it, and the Rio Kid was among them.

"Shut that gate, you fools!" he snarled.

A pistol flamed, almost in his eyes. He felt the singe of the bullet on his numb cheek, and then he realized that there were traitors inside the Fort. His Colt blared back as he whirled into them. Other sentries were running ever, attracted by the hubbub.

The small group of men who had opened the gate scattered under his blasting revolvers. One lay still, face down on the frozen earth. The rest scattered, ducking for nearby cover of buildings. A corporal of the guard and his relief were dashing toward the south gate, as the Rio Kid heard noises just outside and swung in that direction.

There were Sioux there, starting through. He could see the gleam of their eyes and the shape of their

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